



## Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
READING, MA.  
Rk  
2022 APR 13 AM 9:12

### Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

Reading Arpa Advisory Committee

Date: 2022-03-29

Time: 7:00 PM

Building: Reading Community Television -RCTV Location:

Address: 557 Main Street

Session: Open Session

Purpose: Open Meeting

Version: Final

#### Attendees: **Members - Present:**

Chair Marianne Downing, Vice Chair Mark Dockser, Shawn Brandt (remote),  
Geoffrey Coram, Andrew Grimes, Chris Haley, Joe McDonagh, Tom Wise

#### **Members - Not Present:**

#### **Others Present:**

Town Manager Fidel Maltez, Town Accountant Sharon Angstrom (remote),  
School Superintendent Tom Milaschewski, School Director of Finance Sue  
Bottan, Assistant Town Manager Jean Delios (remote);  
Finance Committee members: Chair Ed Ross (remote), Jackie McCarthy  
(remote);  
School Committee members: Erin Gaffen (remote), Sarah McLaughlin  
(remote);  
Public: Emily Sisson (remote), Nancy Tawadros (remote)

**Minutes Respectfully Submitted By:** Jacquelyn LaVerde

---

#### **Topics of Discussion:**

This meeting was held in-person at RCTV studios and remotely via Zoom.

Chair Marianne Downing called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

#### **Public Comment:**

There was no comment from the public.

#### **WATER SEWER PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION: Town Manager Fidel Maltez to address RAAC re: Water/Sewer category of uses for ARPA funding:**

Town Manager Fidel Maltez shared the three top priorities according to his conversations in  
the community: water and sewer rates, school priorities, and athletics and recreation. He  
stated that tonight he will focus on water and sewer "bucket" of ARPA funds.

#### **Upon reaching a quorum, Finance Committee Chair Ed Ross called the Finance Committee to order at 7:08 pm.**

Mr. Maltez reviewed the history for funding the Auburn Street Water Tower. Bids came in  
\$2.5 million over the budgeted amount. Additional funding was sought at a Special Town  
Meeting in October 2021, with \$500,000 from water reserves, and \$2 million authorized to  
bond. Town Meeting approved with the added clauses that the Select Board and Town  
Manager apply for grants to help subsidize the cost or cover a portion with ARPA funds.

Mr. Maltez presented a second option for the water bucket to help alleviate water and sewer rates. Previous Town Manager Bob LeLacheur recommended subsidizing the FY23 Water Enterprise budget with \$750,000 from water reserves to bring water rates to \$12.45 per cubic foot. Mr. Maltez further proposed to lower water rates using \$2 million of ARPA funds, \$1 million in each FY23 and FY24, to bring the rate to \$10.45 per cubic foot.

Other projects such as Walkers Brook Drive and Emerson Street repairs are not attractive for grants, as they are reactive repairs. Grants are typically to improve an area, not repair it. The Town is still paying \$600,000 per year until FY28 for the initial buy-in fee for MWRA. Paying additional funds toward that can be helpful, and having wiggle room in the water rate will enable the Town to have that conversation.

Mr. Maltez noted that while reviewing other MWRA communities, only a handful have one rate for all rate payers. Most communities have adopted a tiered rate structure with higher rates for higher consumption. A funding request for a water rate study is included in this year's Annual Town Meeting warrant. Mark Dockser noted that other communities joining MWRA are receiving better deals, and suggested contacting MWRA to see if anything can be done to improve Reading's rates.

**Upon reaching a quorum, School Committee Chair Tom Wise called the School Committee to order at 7:33 pm.**

**RPS PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION: RPS Superintendent Dr. Tom Milaschewski to address RAAC re: RPS category uses for ARPA funding, including uses for varying allocations, time-sensitive needs, etc.:**

School Superintendent Tom Milaschewski thanked the Committee and Select Board for including the Schools in the ARPA conversation. He presented the three priorities to address issues amplified by the pandemic. Priority #1 is improving academic outcomes by focusing on early literacy, extending and accelerating student learning, and secondary offerings. Priority #2 is to support students social and emotional needs. Priority #3 focuses on enhancing adult practices through professional learning and streamlining systems.

For priority #1, the district received a \$200,000 grant from DESE, which must be used by the end of June, to purchase a high-quality early literacy curriculum for three grade levels, that is aligned to current research and best practices. ARPA funds could help support professional development and teacher materials to effectively roll out the curriculum. To accelerate student learning, the district is trying to invest more in summer programs to close learning gaps. Secondary offerings are being explored with the High School community to create more innovative pathways and offer more hands-on opportunities for students.

For priority #2 to support social and emotional needs, the schools are considering additional contract support. The needs are not yet fully known, but needs are anticipated to continue.

For priority #3 investment is needed in teachers and instructional practice. The current student information system does not meet current needs and needs to be streamlined.

Ms. Downing asked when the schools need to know whether ARPA funds will be used to support the early literacy curriculum. Dr. Milaschewski stated that May would be the perfect time frame to have the decision, so they know whether they can move forward with the program. The amount needed will be determined in another two or three weeks, once the administration gets feedback from teachers on what they will need. Dr. Milaschewski plans to return at the May 11<sup>th</sup> RAAC meeting with further information.

**WORKING LIST DISCUSSION: Discuss and develop rough master list of items and/or item categories that might be suitable for potential ARPA funding and group into related categories as applicable (cost, time sensitivity (if applicable) of items to be clarified at later meeting):**

Ms. Downing shared ideas that were suggested to her by residents such as a cemetery garage, funding a community activity like the Fall Street Faire, writing needs in the high school, IXL in the middle school, teaching fellows to assist with tutoring, and other discreet unfunded community priorities previously presented to the Select Board.

In addition to the water tower and vacation academy, Mr. Coram stated that he would like to see progress on Imagination Station and the Birch Meadow master plan.

**On a motion by Mr. Coram, and seconded by Ms. Downing, the Finance Committee voted 4-0-0 to adjourn at 8:10 pm after Ms. McCarthy left the meeting. Roll call vote: Geoffrey Coram-Yes, Marianne Downing-Yes, Joe McDonagh-Yes, Ed Ross-Yes.**

Mr. Grimes noted that he would like to see pay for essential workers.

Mr. Wise echoed progress on Birch Meadow, and the school initiatives presented by Dr. Milaschewski. He added other projects for consideration including: resurfacing the tennis and basketball courts at Sturges Park, developing the Zanni land into athletic field space, adding more outdoor dining, and development of the RMLD building.

Mr. Dockser presented his own bucket suggestions: a pandemic impact bucket to address issues exposed in the Schools, the senior community, and for people with modest means; a community space bucket for projects such as Birch Meadow, a senior/multigenerational center, a farmers market, and development of the Eastern Gateway; a community smaller projects bucket for small wins like arts, music, and green space; a bigger community projects bucket for bigger projects already discussed; an infrastructure bucket to address ways to replenish water reserves, and add sidewalks, trees, and shady areas; a capital bucket for the water tank, electric vehicles for the Town, and other capital projects that are on the horizon, but not yet on the capital plan such as the bleachers and field house floor; and a community development bucket to address affordable housing. He also suggested leaving a modest amount in reserves for any other unexpected pandemic related issues.

Mr. Haley suggested allocating \$2 million for the water tower. He also suggested adding solar panels to the high school to offset the cost of full day kindergarten, but pivoted to the priorities presented by Dr. Milaschewski. Other priorities proposed by Mr. Haley include: Imagination Station, a dog park, a first-floor bathroom at the senior center, or relocating/supplementing existing senior center programs at other locations, back pay for essential workers, and some portion to address the mental health crisis.

Mr. McDonagh agreed with Imagination Station, and suggested addressing substance abuse, making Reading bike friendly, developing the lot adjacent to Town Forest for better accessibility, and other improvements for the Town Forest.

Mr. Brandt agreed with Birch Meadow and the dog park idea, and noted that Dr. Milaschewski had his proxy on the schools' needs.

Town Accountant Sharon Angstrom presented priorities that she identified with Assessor Victor Santaniello including: reaching out to people of modest means who struggled financially as a result of the pandemic, employee recognition, small business assistance, help for domestic abuse, substance abuse, and mental health, and help for people who fall into the income range to qualify for free and reduced lunch.

**CRITERIA DISCUSSION: Discuss and develop evaluation criteria and/or ranking standards, for RAAC to use in evaluating and prioritizing ARPA spending recommendations:**

The Committee discussed various criteria for considering how to present deliverables to the Select Board including: need, impact, and reach in the community; time sensitivity; urgency; savings provided; doable within the ARPA spending time frame; one-time or time-limited expenses; and provided improvement to residents' quality of life.

Mr. McDonagh and Ms. Downing volunteered to prepare a matrix that lists the priorities along with the criteria for discussion at the next meeting.

**SURVEY DISCUSSION: Review potential community survey questions from RAAC members, example surveys from other communities, discuss survey format and timing:**

The Committee discussed the substance and size of the proposed survey. Members agreed that the survey could be brief, but could incorporate a ranking or rating of a list of projects which could help provide guidance for spending.

In comparing similar surveys from other communities, including Wakefield, Melrose, and Sudbury, the Committee was impressed by the substance of Sudbury's survey, which was conducted by a vendor called Flash Vote. Mr. Dockser submitted an inquiry into pricing for the service and will report back at the next meeting. A specific question from Sudbury's survey: "How would you allocate \$100 across this sample list of projects?" was of particular interest to the Committee.

**Discuss future agenda items:**

Mr. Maltez stated that the Recreation Division will be presenting their status with Birch Meadow and touch upon Imagination Station at the next meeting.

Ms. Downing asked members to take the list of items discussed and try to collate them into buckets for the next meeting.

The survey, plan to roll it out, and platform to use (Survey Monkey, Flash Vote, Google Docs) will also be discussed at the next meeting on April 12<sup>th</sup>.

**Review/Approve minutes from 3/23/2022 meeting:**

**On a motion by Mr. Wise, and seconded by Mr. Dockser, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 8-0-0 to approve the meeting minutes of March 23, 2022 as written.**

**Roll call vote: Shawn Brandt-Yes, Geoffrey Coram-Yes, Andrew Grimes-Yes, Tom Wise-Yes, Mark Dockser-Yes, Chris Haley-Yes, Joe McDonagh-Yes, Marianne Downing-Yes.**

**On a motion by Mr. Wise, and seconded by Mr. Brandt, the School Committee voted 4-0-0 to adjourn at 9:37 pm.**

**Roll call vote: Erin Gaffen-Yes, Sarah McLaughlin-Yes, Shawn Brandt-Yes, Tom Wise-Yes.**

**On a motion by Mr. Grimes, and seconded by Mr. Wise, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 8-0-0 to adjourn at 9:37 pm.**

**Roll call vote: Shawn Brandt-Yes, Joe McDonagh-Yes, Chris Haley-Yes, Mark Dockser-Yes, Tom Wise-Yes, Andrew Grimes-Yes, Geoffrey Coram-Yes, Marianne Downing-Yes.**