



## Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

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### Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

Reading Arpa Advisory Committee

Date: 2022-05-11

Time: 7:00 PM

Building: Reading Public Library

Location: Community Room

Address: 64 Middlesex Avenue

Session: Open Session

Purpose: General Business

Version: Final

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

Chair Marianne McLaughlin-Downing, Vice Chair Mark Dockser, Shawn Brandt, Geoffrey Coram, Andrew Grimes, Chris Haley, Tom Wise

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

Joe McDonagh

#### **Others Present:**

School Superintendent Tom Milaschewski, School Finance Director Susan Botta, School Asst Superintendent of Learning & Teaching Sarah Hardy, Special Education Teacher Kerry Mullen, Joshua Eaton Elementary School Principal Caitlin Shelburne, Town Manager Fidel Maltez, Town Accountant Sharon Angstrom (remote), Assistant Town Manager Jean Delios (remote), Director of Community Services Kevin Bohmiller (remote), Recreation Administrator Jenna Fiorente (remote), Business Administrator Jayne Wellman (remote)

School Committee Members: Sarah McLaughlin (remote), Carla Nazzaro, Chuck Robinson

Select Board Members: Carlo Bacci (remote), Karen Herrick, Jackie McCarthy (remote)

**Minutes Respectfully Submitted By:** Jacquelyn LaVerde

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

This meeting was held in person at the Reading Public Library Community Room and remotely via Zoom.

Chair Marianne Downing called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and reviewed the evening's agenda.

School Committee Chair Tom Wise called the School Committee to order at 7:03 pm.  
Roll call: Sarah McLaughlin (remote), Carla Nazzaro, Chuck Robinson, Shawn Brandt, Tom Wise.

#### **Public Comment:**

There was no comment from the public.

Select Board Chair Mark Dockser called the Select Board to order at 7:05 pm.  
Roll Call: Jackie McCarthy (remote), Karen Herrick, Chris Haley, Mark Dockser.

**PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION/VOTE - Reading Public Schools to present one-time sensitive asks for RPS funding out of ARPA for RAAC approval to send on to Reading Select Board for their 5/17 meeting:**

School Superintendent Thomas Milaschewski was joined by Assistant Superintendent of Learning and Teaching Sarah Hardy, Special Education Teacher Kerry Mullen, Joshua Eaton Principal Caitlin Shelburne, and Director of Finance Susan Bottan. He explained how ARPA funds could help fund the School Department's most important priority and goal to ensure that all students are reading at grade level.

The pandemic raised the urgency of a better literacy curriculum. The current program requires a lot of research and planning time on the teachers. The district has received a \$200,000 accelerating literacy grant to help implement a new reading curriculum. The materials must be received by June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022 in order to receive the grant funds. However, additional funds are needed to fully implement the program over the next four years. The School Department assembled a literacy research team to find a better program. Ms. Hardy explained that through the team's extensive work and research, American Reading Company (ARC) Core was the clear program that they believe will work the best based on ratings, Curate and EDReports, and speaking with other districts that have implemented the curriculum. She provided a detailed description of how the program works, how much it will cost, and the plan for the department to implement it.

Ms. Bottan reviewed the plan and cost for implementation. Year one will begin implementation for grades 3-5 and cost the district \$433,570 in the current Fiscal Year. Year two will see the continuation of implementation in grades 3-5, the start of K-2, and cost \$791,425 in FY23. Year three will continue implementation in 3-5 and K-2, and cost \$403,965 in FY 24. Year four sees the ongoing renewal in grades 3-5 and continuation in K-2, and cost \$371,040 in FY25. The total request of ARPA funds is for \$2 million to fully implement the program.

Mark Dockser asked why operating funds were not being used beyond year one and suggested that other funding opportunities, including operating budget and additional grants be explored to support the program instead of using ARPA funds. Dr. Milaschewski explained that they have not yet begun the process for the FY24 budget, could not confidently report to teachers and parents that they could fully implement the curriculum without the help of ARPA funds, and that this program aligns with the intended use of ARPA funds.

Dr. Milaschewski and School Department staff engaged in a lengthy discussion and answered many questions posed by the members of the RAAC, School Committee, and Select Board. Following discussion, a majority of those present expressed support for the full \$2 million request. Mark Dockser and Karen Herrick of the Select Board were hesitant to fulfill the full request.

**Shawn Brandt moved that the RAAC recommend that the Select Board allocate \$2 million for Reading Public Schools to invest in a literacy curriculum. Motion seconded by Chris Haley. Following discussion, Mark Dockser moved to amend the recommended amount to \$433,570, seconded by Andrew Grimes. The Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 6-1 against the amendment, with only Mark Dockser in favor.**

**On the original motion to recommend \$2 million be allocated, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 6-1 in favor, with Mark Dockser opposed.**

**PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - Reading Elder Services to address RAAC re: possible Elder Services uses for ARPA funding:**

Assistant Town Manager Jean Delios was joined by Community Services Director Kevin Bohmiller and Recreation Administrator Jenna Fiorente to present the ways ARPA funds can help the Senior population.

**On a motion by Tom Wise, and seconded by Shawn Brandt, the School Committee voted 3-0 to adjourn at 9:15 pm.**

**Roll call vote: Chuck Robinson-Yes, Shawn Brandt-Yes, Tom Wise-Yes. Sarah McLaughlin and Carla Nazzaro had already left the meeting.**

Ms. Delios provided an overview of the services the Elder and Human Services division offers to the community, particularly to the senior population who were significantly impacted by the isolation caused by the pandemic. A needs assessment, conducted by the UMass Gerontology Institute back in 2017 determined that the Pleasant Street Senior Center, a converted Fire Station, had outlived its useful life, and suggested that it was time to begin planning for a new facility. Staff was lost in 2019, then COVID hit in 2020, which stalled progress until funding was secured in 2021 and the Reading Center for Active Living Committee (ReCalc) was created. Through the efforts of ReCalc, a partnership was renewed with the UMass Gerontology Institute and a planning effort for a new senior center is underway. The next steps with UMass are to collect data and engage a consultant to perform a feasibility study.

Ideas suggested by the Council on Aging that could be addressed using ARPA funds in order of priority include: \$300,000 for a feasibility study for a new Senior Center, \$250,000 for supplemental programming using other facilities, \$150,000 to enhance transportation and trips, \$75,000 for outsourced mental health services, \$25,000 for virtual programming, \$50,000 for a Volunteer Coordinator (outsourced help, not a salaried position), and \$50,000 for accessibility improvements such as a microphone and other modifications for people who are hard of hearing. The total for all suggested requests is \$900,000.

Committee members expressed support. Committee members also expressed concern, as some of the requests seem like recurring expenses or salaries that would not be sustainable without continued funding, and were surprised that a first-floor bathroom was not included in the requests. Ms. Delios explained that the intent is to address the Town Meeting instructional motion to supplement programming, and to bridge the gap until more progress can be made on a new Senior Center. She also noted that to add a first-floor bathroom would be a significant expense in a building that is not intended to remain occupied.

The Committee requested a further breakdown of the cost of each request.

Chair Marianne Downing called for a five-minute recess at 10:13 pm.

**On a motion by Karen Herrick, and seconded by Mark Dockser, the Select Board voted 3-0 to adjourn at 10:13 pm. Carlo Bacci and Jackie McCarthy had already left the meeting.**

The RAAC reconvened at 10:19 pm.

**PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION VOTE -RAAC SURVEY**

**1. Review and discuss draft survey format and questions as prepared by Jayne Wellman, revise as necessary.**

**2. Decide on release date, survey deadline, where to distribute paper copies and where they will be collected.**

**3. Determine who will review results, who has access.**

**4. Vote to approve 1-3 above.:**

**On a motion by Tom Wise, and seconded by Shawn Brandt, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 6-0 to take the RAAC Survey agenda item out of order.**

RAAC member Andrew Grimes left the in-person meeting and joined remotely for the remainder of the meeting.

Business Administrator presented the draft of the survey, based on RAAC's feedback, with the goal of prioritizing the community's interest for ARPA funding. The Committee reviewed the proposed questions including: the Town's characteristics of strengths, areas the Town



can improve, how a respondent would spend \$100 amongst suggested projects, a ranking of priority of a sample list of projects, and some basic demographic data. Due to the formatting limitations of Survey Monkey, the Committee agreed to forego the \$100 question, and came to a consensus on the details of the remaining questions.

Ms. Wellman will send the final draft to the Chair and Vice Chair for final approval before posting it early next week. The survey will be promoted on the Town website, the RAAC webpage, Town social media, SeeClickFix, and will be asked to be included in school newsletters. Paper copies will be available at various locations including Town Hall, Pleasant Street Center, and Library. It will also be promoted at Friends & Family Day on June 11<sup>th</sup>, and closed at the end of the day on June 12<sup>th</sup>, with results to be shared with the Committee at their added meeting on Wednesday, June 15<sup>th</sup>.

**On a motion by Tom Wise, and seconded by Shawn Brandt, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 7-0 to approve the Chair and Vice Chair to finalize the survey based on the feedback provided by the Committee this evening.**

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

**PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION/VOTE - Town manager to present water rate information relating to RAAC vote to allocate \$650,000 from ARPA to the water enterprise funds for RAAC discussion and vote to send on to Reading Select Board for 5/17 meeting:**

Town Manager Fidel Maltez reviewed his previous request for \$2 million of ARPA funds to help subsidize FY23 water rates. Historically, reserves have been used to cushion water rates. However, recent water main breaks have taken a toll on reserves. Sewer reserves are still quite strong. Mr. Maltez proposed to use \$650,000 of water reserves and \$650,000 of ARPA funds to lower water rates, which will result in a 4.6% increase on water rates. He also proposed to use \$450,000 of sewer reserves to decrease sewer rates by 0.3%. This results in an increase of only 2.2% to the combined water and sewer rate.

Mr. Maltez suggested this helps cushion the rates one more year while the Town works with a consultant to transition to a tiered structured rate in FY24.

**On a motion by Shawn Brandt, and seconded by Mark Dockser, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 7-0 to recommend to the Select Board to allocate \$650,000 of ARPA funds to the Water Enterprise Fund.**

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

**Discuss future agenda items:**

Ms. Downing noted that at the next meeting on May 24<sup>th</sup>, the RAAC can discuss smaller items, take stock of the requests to date, and discuss the survey.

Ms. Downing asked if the RAAC should plan to attend the May 17<sup>th</sup> Select Board meeting. Members agreed that the RAAC should be posted to attend, and Mr. Dockser suggested having RAAC reports at the start of the Water & Sewer rate public hearing and the Schools' presentation.

Mr. Maltez requested to come back with more details on the Seniors' requests and get a vote.

Mr. Wise suggested sharing lists with Ms. Downing of the requests he has received. Ms. Downing agreed that the requests could be included in the next packet, and the next meeting would be a good opportunity to hear from those groups if they wish to speak to the Committee.

**Review/Approve minutes from 4/12/2022 meeting:**

Shawn Brandt moved to approve the meeting minutes of April 12, 2022. The motion was seconded by Tom Wise.

Mark Dockser stated that he noticed some errors, but had not yet reviewed the minutes.  
**On a motion by Mark Dockser and seconded by Marianne Downing, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 7-0 to table the approval of the minutes to the next meeting.**

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

**On a motion by Shawn Brandt, and seconded by Tom Wise, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 7-0 to adjourn at 11:30 pm.**

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