



Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

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Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

Reading Arpa Advisory Committee

Date: 2022-05-24

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 Downing, Vice Chair Mark Dockser, Shawn Brandt, Geoffrey Coram, Andrew Grimes, Chris Haley, Joe McDonagh

Members - Not Present:

Thomas Wise

Others Present:

Town Manager Fidel Maltez, Assistant Town Manager Jean Delios, Elder & Human Services Administrator Amy O'Brien, Community Services Director Kevin Bohmiller, Recreation Administrator Jenna Fiorente, Town Accountant Sharon Angstrom (remote), Planner Andrew MacNichol (remote), Conservation Administrator Chuck Tirone (remote), Senior Civil Engineer Alex Rozycki (remote)

Select Board Members: Jackie McCarthy (remote), Karen Gately Herrick
Public: Nora Bucko (remote), Rosemarie DeBenedetto, Marilyn Shapleigh, Chris Jones, Richard Abate, Erica McNamara, John Parsons, Bob Holmes, Nancy Ziemplak, John Sasso, Scott Craven, Stephen Bohannon, Maureen Griffin-Stone, Maria Morais, Michael Fiorentino

Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Jacquelyn LaVerde

Topics of Discussion:

This meeting was held in-person in the Community Room of the Library, and remotely via Zoom.

Chair Marianne Downing called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and provided an overview of the evening's agenda.

Select Board Chair Mark Dockser called the Select Board meeting to order at 7:03 pm.

Public Comment:

There was no comment from the public.

Town Manager Fidel Maltez shared that the RAAC survey had over 300 responses on its first day and now has over 500 responses.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION/VOTE - Elder Services/Jean Delios/Town Manager to provide updated, time-sensitive request for ARPA funding for elder services/senior needs, including more details on listed items in \$900K ARPA request presented at 5/11/2022 RAAC meeting:

Assistant Town Manager Jean Delios was joined by (retiring) Community Services Director Kevin Bohmiller, his successor Jenna Fiorente, Elder and Human Services Administrator Amy O'Brien, members of the Council on Aging, and patrons of the senior center. She shared details of the growing senior population, and the history of the Pleasant Street Center. A needs assessment conducted by the UMASS Gerontology Institute in 2017 determined that the Pleasant Street Center was too small, there was not enough staff, and it was time to plan what to do. Some improvements were made to the Center, but then COVID hit and hindered efforts. The Center has been reopening slowly to ensure that it is safe, but staff has taken the opportunity to start planning for a new Center. The Reading Center for Active Living Committee (ReCalc) was appointed by the Select Board in 2021 and has been hard at work since January 2022, once again in partnership with the UMASS Gerontology institute, conducting community outreach. The next steps in the process are to conduct a feasibility study for a new facility, and a community survey in the fall. In the meantime, seniors have spoken up about what they want in the short-term including: transportation, entertainment, trips, and more programming.

Elder Services is requesting \$900,000 from ARPA funds, which over the next 24 months will provide: \$300,000 for a feasibility study, \$250,000 for supplemental programming (space rentals, instructors, staff support, and food), \$150,000 for senior bus trips, \$75,000 for wellness programs, \$25,000 for contracted virtual programming, \$50,000 for a contracted volunteer coordinator, and \$50,000 for accessibility improvements to the Pleasant Street Center (interpreters and audio systems).

Chris Haley reiterated his suggestion to incorporate the purchase of a food truck, then contract out the meal prep to help supplement the meals provided at the Senior Center, and suggested increasing the requested amount to \$1 million. Ms. Downing stated that she likes the idea of providing more and better food for the seniors, but would like Town Counsel to weigh in on the food truck idea.

Committee members were mostly in favor of the Elder and Human Services request, but expressed concern about the ability to maintain these services beyond ARPA funding. Ms. Delios explained that the idea is to use this as a pilot program to produce results, then ask Town Meeting for a full-time coordinator with supporting data to prove that more can be done with more resources. Dr. Coram expressed concern with voting to recommend allocating more funds before reviewing and considering the results of the community survey.

Rosemarie DeBenedetto of Haystack Road, patron of the senior center, noted that current seniors may not live long enough to see a new center, and that seniors want to be active and together now.

John Sasso of Richards Road, member of ReCalc, noted that there is an urgency to provide programs for seniors and that Town Meeting voted overwhelmingly in favor of supporting the short-term needs of the seniors.

On a motion by Shawn Brandt, and seconded by Mark Dockser, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 6-0-1 to recommend that the Select Board allocate \$900,000 of ARPA funds to support Elder Services, with Geoffrey Coram abstaining, as he would like to review the results of the survey.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - READING FIRST RESPONDERS: Lt. Detective Abate on behalf of Reading first responders, ARPA funding request for premium pay for first responders based on work during pandemic (follow up to public comment at 4/12/2022 meeting); community comparisons of ARPA funding in other communities for similar purpose:

Lt. Det. Rich Abate, reviewed the statement prepared by the first responder units, which was originally presented at the Financial Forum back in the fall. As requested by the RAAC at a previous meeting, Lt. Abate presented comparisons of 28 other Massachusetts communities that have allotted a portion of their ARPA funds to first responders. He

formally requested \$750,000, or 10% of the Town's ARPA grant, which would provide approximately \$7,281 per firefighter, patrol officer and dispatcher who worked during the pandemic.

Committee members expressed their support for the first responders, but noted that there were other groups who were also essential and working in-person during the pandemic. They want to be careful not to exclude them.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - AFSCME LOCAL 1703: Michael Fiorentino on behalf of AFSCME local 1703, relating to ARPA funding request for hazard/premium pay for represented municipal workers, based on work during pandemic:

Mike Fiorentino, the staff representative for AFSCME Council 93, was present on behalf of the approximately 125 staff members across seven AFSCME units in Reading. He noted that a vast majority of staff in other bargaining units, such as school cafeteria workers, custodial, and DPW, also worked in-person during the pandemic. He stated that he did not have figures to present at this time, but wanted to open up the dialog.

Steve Bohannon, Electrician in the Facilities Department, noted that there were a few days early in the pandemic they were sent home, but it was quickly realized that "all hands on deck" were needed in-person in Facilities.

The Committee recessed briefly at 8:52 pm and reconvened at 8:57 pm.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - READING HISTORICAL COMMISSION: Samantha Couture/Town to present ARPA funding request for certain Historical Commission needs, including digitization, temporary archivist, software:

Samantha Couture, Chair of the Reading Historical Commission, presented the Commission's mission and an overview of its collection.

Current issues the Commission is facing are the lack of climate control with occasional water leakage in the archive, insufficient space and no room for growth, inadequate staffing, and an inability for Commission members to access anything from home. Many items have been acquired over the past few years with no place to store them, and no one to catalog them. A preservation needs assessment was conducted in 2019 which provided recommendations for collection management, increased staff time, and monitoring the storage environment.

The Commission is requesting \$13,500 of ARPA funds, which includes: \$7,500 for the digitization of photos and maps, and to reprint and frame high quality reproductions; \$5,000 for a temporary archivist; and \$1,000 for collection management software.

Ms. Downing asked how the software was different than the software utilized by the Town Clerk, and whether the Town Archive could use it. Ms. Couture stated she would speak with Town Clerk Laura Gemme about it.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - CONSERVATION: Conservation/Town to present ARPA funding request for certain needs relating to Maillet Sommes Morgan conservation lands:

Senior Civil Engineer Alex Rozycki was present with Senior Planner Andrew MacNichol and Conservation Administrator Chuck Tirone to discuss a project on the Maillet Conservation land. The project is designed to treat regional flooding throughout the Mystic River watershed for the 10-year storm event in 2070. Over 450 sites were evaluated in the entire watershed, with this site in Reading selected as one of six conceptual designs. For funding, there is a current Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant, and earmarks requested from Senators Warren and Markey, and Congressman Seth Moulton. Project benefits include flooding mitigation locally and regionally, invasive species removal, improved accessibility, educational opportunities, and green space improvements. Total funding requests are \$2.5 million to \$3 million. The request for ARPA funds is \$100,000 to finish the design documents to get the project shovel ready and make it a more attractive recipient for earmarks.

Committee members discussed the time sensitive request for the funds and the other funding sources. Mr. Rozycki stated that he will bring a scope of work to the next meeting.

Discuss future agenda items:

The Committee discussed items to discuss at future meetings including: a follow up on the Conservation project, follow up from the Birch Meadow Master Plan, survey results, vote on the Conservation project, Trails Committee, food truck possibility, and affordable housing.

Review/Approve minutes from 4/12/2022 meeting and 5/11/2022 meeting:

On a motion by Shawn Brandt, and seconded by Mark Dockser, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 7-0 to approve the meeting minutes of April 12, 2022 as presented.

On a motion by Shawn Brandt, and seconded by Mark Dockser, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 6-0-1 to approve the meeting minutes of May 11, 2022 as amended on the floor, with Mr. McDonagh abstaining, as he was not present at that meeting.

The Select Board did not adjourn, as Jackie McCarthy and Karen Herrick had already left the meeting.

On a motion by Shawn Brandt, and seconded by Andrew Grimes, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 7-0 to adjourn at 10:06 pm.