



Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

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Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

Reading Arpa Advisory Committee

Date: 2022-06-15

Time: 7:00 PM

Building: Reading Town Hall

Location: Select Board Meeting Room

Address: 16 Lowell Street

Session: Open Session

Purpose: General Business

Version: Final

Attendees: **Members - Present:**

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

Members - Not Present:

Others Present:

Town Manager Fidel Maltez, Town Accountant Sharon Angstrom (remote), Business Administrator Jayne Wellman (remote), Community Services Director Jenna Fiorente, Conservation Administrator Chuck Tirone, Senior Planner Andrew MacNichol (remote), Sr. Civil Engineer Alex Rozycki (remote);

Select Board Members: Jackie McCarthy (remote), Karen Herrick (remote - arrived 7:54 pm);

Bill Sullivan, Angela Binda, Nancy Reid, Mary Ann Higgins, Will Finch, Joseph Carnahan, Andrew Dribin, David Williams, Rosemarie DeBenedetto, Bob Holmes (remote), Melissa Pucci (remote), E Shapiro (remote), Laura Noonan (remote), Rich (remote), Maria Morgan (remote), Emily Sisson (remote), Kathy Kelly (remote)

Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Jacquelyn LaVerde

Topics of Discussion:

This meeting was held in the Select Board Meeting Room of Town Hall and remotely via Zoom.

Chair Marianne Downing called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm and reviewed the evening's agenda.

Mark Dockser called the Select Board to order at 7:06 pm.

Public Comment:

Angela Binda of Orchard Park Drive noted that the bleachers and field house were on the spreadsheet of proposed projects and asked why they were there. Marianne Downing explained that in the beginning of the RAAC process, members suggested projects that the funds could be used for. The bleachers and field house were suggested because they have been on the capital plan. But the School Department had their requests and are not asking for any more ARPA funds.

Melissa Pucci advocated for using ARPA funds on underserved populations really impacted by COVID, particularly those with disabilities and suggested adding adaptive programs. Community Services Director Jenna Fiorente explained that she, along with other School and Town staff, have been attending many meetings to get better at offering more adaptive and inclusive programs.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - ARPA SURVEY RESULTS - Jayne Wellman to present results of ARPA survey; discussion by RAAC on same:

Business Administrator Jayne Wellman presented the results of the community survey. There were 1,162 responses. Strengths according to the survey were Reading's convenient location, quality of schools, physical safety and security, and sense of community. Opportunities for improvement or investment included quality of schools, town buildings and infrastructure, local recreation and culture, commercial development opportunities, and range and cost of available housing. Top ranking sample projects in order of priority were expanding educational programming; tied for second was improving or adding to green space and water/sewer and flood control infrastructure; and tied for third was improving or augmenting recreational facilities, improving town buildings and infrastructure, supporting essential workers, and roadway infrastructure.

Ms. Wellman reviewed the demographic data, and responses broken down by age groups. Key takeaways include: housing is not affordable and is impacting every age group, improvement/investment in recreation was a consistent priority, investing in senior services is a clear top priority for the older segments of the population, there is strong support for improvement to town buildings and infrastructure across all age groups, support for essential workers only ranked high in three age segments, and residents of all ages support the schools.

Committee members discussed the results, and Marianne Downing noted that the allocations RAAC has recommended, and the Select Board have voted to allocate, have aligned with the priorities of the community.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - BM MASTER PLAN - Follow up on Birch Meadow Master Plan and requests for ARPA funding:

Community Services Director Jenna Fiorente reviewed the history of the Birch Meadow Master Plan. The idea was brought up in 2007, but has never received funding. The request is for \$1.5 million in ARPA funds for: \$800,000 for the central spine walkway, restrooms, and pavilion; \$150,000 for a lacrosse wall; and \$550,000 to redevelop the Imagination Station parking lot. The new parking lot will have a total of 38 parking spaces. The total number of parking spaces gained for the whole project will be 87 spaces. The walkway and new parking lot will be ADA compliant. The lacrosse league was willing to donate funds in the past for a lacrosse wall, and might still be willing, but might not be able to donate as largely as before. Ms. Fiorente noted that it would behoove the Town to fund all three items at once, as there is a cost savings, but if having to choose a priority, the walkway and lacrosse wall would come before the parking lot. Emily Sisson and Angela Binda, members of the Recreation Committee, echoed the importance of the walkway, restrooms, and pavilion. Senior Civil Engineer Alex Rozycki also noted that stormwater standards for redevelopment might require some sort of stormwater treatment to meet MS-4 requirements. While the parking lot might not be a popular piece, it might be needed in order to break ground on the other elements.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - CONSERVATION - Chuck Tirone to present on ARPA funding request for conservation needs including Bare Meadow maintenance, surveys for land donations, Mattera bike rack, invasive species management:

Conservation Commission Member Joe Carnahan and Conservation Administrator Chuck Tirone presented Conservation's ARPA request for \$31,500 including: \$10,000 to develop a maintenance plan for Bare Meadow Conservation Area, \$9,000 for two surveys for land donated on Sanborn Lane and Grove Street, \$2,500 for a bike rack at Mattera Cabin, and \$10,000 for invasive species management on Conservation lands.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - TRAILS: Presentation on Trails Committee request for funding for shelving, boardwalk supplies:

Dave Williams presented the Trails Committee request for ARPA funds for supplies including: \$5,100 to purchase three sections of commercial grade shelving to store supplies at the Mattera Cabin garage, and \$6,520 to purchase supplies and materials to build, repair, or replace 200 linear feet of bridges and boardwalks. Trail use increased in 2020 due to COVID and remains high.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - READING GARDEN CLUB - Review Garden Club request for annual funding for each of 3 ARPA years to help reinstate various garden club activities, community education, etc.:

Nancy Reid and Mary Ann Higgins of the Reading Garden Club presented the Club's request for a portion of funds that they lost during COVID. The request is for \$12,000, or \$4,000 for each of the three years that the Garden Club was unable to hold their Plant Sale. The Garden Club uses the proceeds from their Annual Plant Sale to provide environmental grants for 10th and 11th grade students; and to donate to the Food Pantry, Mission of Deeds, and Reading Land Trust. The Club would also like to add planter baskets to the lampposts downtown and is getting pricing quotes to purchase and water them. The requested funds would support all programs and the request is not time sensitive.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - TOWN FOREST - Review Town Forest Committee request for funding to assist with tree and invasive plant removal:

Town Forest Committee Chair Bill Sullivan presented the issues in Town Forest. There are non-native red pines throughout the forest that are dying, under stress, and becoming vulnerable to insects and fungus, which pose a safety risk if they fall or catch fire. There are also invasive species growing more widespread throughout the forest. The Town Forest Committee is requesting \$150,000-\$200,000 of ARPA funds for phases three and four of the red pine removal, and for invasive species management. There is only a brief time of year that the tree removal work can be done, as the ground needs to be frozen. Phase three would take place in January of 2023, and phase four in January 2024. The forestry division of the DPW does not have the equipment, or the harvester needed for this scale of work. Mr. Sullivan stated that if the Committee could get \$50,000 for phase three, it would be a great help. A \$10,000 grant was received from the Mass DCR for phase two. Mr. Dockser noted that the Select Board will ask the state delegation to consider this project as well.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - Reading Teachers Association (RTA) Reading Paraeducators Union and the Reading Administrative Secretaries Union have a request to be included in any consideration for use of ARPA funds as hazard pay for town employees:

Marianne Downing shared the request from the Reading teachers. They would like to be included in hazard pay for Town employees, as the RAAC has already heard from the Police, Fire, and Dispatchers, Facilities, DPW, and cafeteria workers, who worked throughout the pandemic.

Tom Wise noted that there were phases of the pandemic, and would consider the hazard period as the first wave from March 2020 until the vaccine was made available to everyone around May 2021. Members agreed the time frame seemed appropriate.

Members of the Committee also discussed the emotional toll of peoples' jobs, and expressed concern with making this decision divisive. They also discussed possible ways to weight the request, determine how many employees are affected, and how funds would be distributed to employees.

DISCUSSION/VOTE - CONSERVATION MAILLET/SOMMES - follow up on Conservation/Town request at 5/24 meeting for time sensitive request of \$50k-\$100k towards planning mitigation projects for Maillet Sommes Morgan conservation lands (to help move project forward towards state MVP grant):

Senior Civil Engineer Alex Rozycki reviewed the history of the land, the current conditions of the proposed project area, and the benefits and progress of the project. The original ARPA

request is for \$112,000 for design services. DPW allocated \$50,000 out of the FY22 budget to get the process started. The total needed to get the design and invasive species management done before the next fiscal year is a minimum of \$77,000.

Mr. Rozycki noted that ARPA funding is the right avenue for this project, as it provides positive feedback and momentum for earmarks and grants, speaks to the priorities supported in the survey, and will benefit the immediate vicinity and larger region as the climate changes.

On a motion by Shawn Brandt, and seconded by Mark Dockser, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 8-0 to recommend to the Select Board to allocate \$77,000 of ARPA funds for the construction project at the Maillet Sommes Conservation Land.

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

DISCUSSION - SENIOR NEEDS FOLLOW UP - Discuss how/if ARPA can be used in more immediate way to help improve food quality for seniors, housing affordability, higher food costs, food truck feasibility:

Rosemarie DeBenedetto expressed her frustration with the survey, and noted that there was a low return from the senior population because many seniors do not have access to computers, and the text on the printed copies were too small to read. She noted that there are not many food options at the Senior Center, and opined that a food truck is a good idea, but the Town does not have to own it.

DISCUSSION - ARPA FUNDING REQUESTS - REVIEW ALL IN VIEW OF SURVEY RESULTS - Review table data on all ARPA requests received thus far, including this evening, review votes taken, compare requests with survey results, plan next steps:

Marianne Downing reviewed the table of all requests for ARPA funds that have been received, and what funding has already been allocated. The Committee discussed how to recommend funding the highest priorities, having a second tier of suggested requests for any funds that might be left over from other projects, and what projects should be budget items.

DISCUSSION - FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS & JUN-AUG MEETING DATES:

Marianne Downing asked if the RAAC would need to vote on the \$4,500 for the survey of Conservation land. Mr. Maltez stated that the item is on the Select Board's agenda for June 28th and suggested moving forward without the formal endorsement of RAAC. Though most RAAC members expressed their support for the request.

Committee members discussed prioritizing projects. Marianne Downing tasked the members with ranking their priorities and dollar amounts to be compared at the next meeting. The objective is to have the deliverables by the end of the summer.

Members discussed future meeting dates agreed to schedule meetings for July 13th and August 3rd.

On a motion by Chris Haley, and seconded by Mark Dockser, the Select Board voted 2-0 to adjourn at 11:11 pm, as Jackie McCarthy and Karen Herrick had already left the meeting.

RAAC Members were asked to submit their ranking to the Town Manager ahead of the next meeting on July 13th.

DISCUSSION/VOTE - to approve meeting minutes of 5/24/2022 meeting:

On a motion by Shawn Brandt, and seconded by Tom Wise, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 7-0-1, with Tom Wise abstaining, as he was not present

at the meeting, to approve the meeting minutes of May 24, 2022 as amended, with clarification when the Select Board was called to order.

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

On a motion by Mark Dockser and seconded by Tom Wise, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 8-0 to adjourn at 11:15 pm.

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