



Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
READING, MA.

2022 SEP -1 AM 7:48

Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

Reading Arpa Advisory Committee

Date: 2022-08-03

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 (remote), Geoffrey Coram (remote), Chris Haley, Joe McDonagh, Tom Wise

Members - Not Present:

Andrew Grimes

Others Present:

Town Manager Fidel Maltez, Town Accountant Sharon Angstrom (remote), Community Services Director Jenna Fiorente (remote), Roisin Munson, Gioia Butler, Jess Bailey, Tim McIntire, Michelle Hopkinson, Gail Calazza, Diane Finigan, Gregory Cate, Sherilla Lestrade, Karen Gately Herrick, Laura King (remote), Karesa Killam (remote), Sarah Cestrone (remote), Joellen Killam (remote), Jeniffer Rogers (remote), Ali (remote), Rev Emilia Attridge (remote), Joyce's iphone (remote), Mary Anne (remote), VIP (remote), Meg Powers (remote), Catherine's iphone (remote), Ellen Commito (remote), Ann's iphone (remote), Lauren Gramolini (remote), Vanessa Alvarado, Simone Payment (remote), Hal Torman (remote), Meesh 814 (remote), Mark Farrin (remote), Chuck Webberly, Pastor Joseph Young

Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Jacquelyn LaVerde

Topics of Discussion:

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

Chair Marianne Downing called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - Reading Teachers Association representative(s) to present/discuss on pandemic impact on RTA members in consideration of premium pay; follow up RAAC discussion questions on same:

Jess Bailey, president of the Reading Teachers Association, along with members Michelle Hopkinson, Ro Munson, Tim McIntyre, and Gioia Butler, contextualized the experiences of teachers during the pandemic and asked that the RAAC hold all bargaining units to the same standards. Teachers shared their experiences struggling to get kids to wear masks properly, having added responsibility of cleaning, having to alter routines and family interactions, having increased workloads and taking on additional roles, having salaries affected where stipends for extracurriculars were reduced, managing hybrid classroom models, and risking exposure to COVID.

Select Board Chair Mark Dockser called the Select Board to order at 7:10 pm.

The Committee members asked many questions about how many teachers were in-person and when, and which teachers they feel are included in the request for ARPA funds. Ms. Bailey stated that the RTA is not asking for people who have left, or left the profession, but are asking the RAAC to consider people who retired. She also stated that they will work with the administration to collect data as requested by the Committee, including who worked in-person and when, and who and how many staff had their stipends reduced.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - Reading Paraeducators representative(s) to present/discuss on pandemic impact on Reading paras members in consideration of premium pay; follow up RAAC discussion questions on same:

Gail Calazza, Treasurer of the Reading Paraeducators union, noted that their union agrees with a lot that was laid out by Jess Bailey of the RTA, but wanted to focus on the risks that paraeducators took during the pandemic. The average age of paras is over 50 years-old and many have underlying conditions. This posed risks to themselves, their families, and those who support their elderly parents. Many took leaves, and left the profession for good. Ms. Calazza noted that paraeducators are some of the lowest paid employees in the district. Paras assisted with the hybrid model by working in-person with students, taking on multiple students across multiple grade levels due to the shortage of paras, and working in windowless classrooms where air circulation was a concern. There are approximately 115 paraeducators in the union, about 75% of whom are full time. The Paraeducators are asking that COVID funds be distributed equitably for those who worked from September 2020 to June 2021.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION - Reading School Secretaries representative(s) to present/discuss on pandemic impact on Reading secretaries members in consideration of premium pay; follow up RAAC discussion questions on same:

Diane Finnegan, President of the Reading Association of Secretaries recalled the experiences of the school secretaries during the pandemic. On March 13th, everyone was sent home, but the school secretaries continued to work from home. In May, the secretaries were asked to return to their buildings. They worked with administrative staff to empty lockers and desks, and facilitated the return of belongings to staff and students. The office is the hub of activity of the school, and secretaries were always in the presence of other people, including students who were symptomatic waiting to see the school nurse. Pool testing was also organized by the secretaries. Ten of the thirteen secretaries work year-round, with the other three working August to June. They tracked who was remote or not, and when attendance was affected by quarantine. The Secretaries are asking to be treated equitably in the distribution of ARPA funds, and are asking for pay for nine secretaries who started in May through August 2020, and three who worked from May to June 2020, not including one who retired at the end of June.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION (follow up) - Reading Chamber of Commerce to present/discuss updated request for ARPA funding in view of receiving state grant of \$25k:

Jeniffer Rogers, President of the Reading North Reading Chamber of Commerce, and Laura King, Treasurer, provided an updated request to the RAAC, which was adjusted due to funding coming from the state. The Chamber is requesting: \$15,000 to support membership, which is down due to COVID; \$10,000 for extensive marketing for Shop the Readings; and \$4,000 for signage downtown to alert people to the fact that stores are open during construction. The North Reading Economic Development Committee is also contributing \$8,900 for the Shop the Readings campaign. The \$15,000 helps support new memberships, and memberships for businesses who are past due, but unable to justify the expense at this time, as they are still trying to recover from the impacts of COVID. It will help membership for the next two to three years. The focus is on businesses that need the help.

The Reading ARPA Advisory Committee held a brief recess at 8:43 pm and was called back to order at 8:49 pm.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION (follow up) - Recreation Dept and Reading Youth Lacrosse to present on funding for Lacrosse wall, possible supplemental sources, and RAAC discussion on same:

Chuck Webberly, President of Reading Youth Lacrosse, outlined the benefits of having a lacrosse wall, not just for lacrosse, but also for soccer, tennis, and stick ball skills. Years ago, one of the members on the Youth Lacrosse Board worked in construction and was going to be able to get the wall donated. But that member is no longer on the board, and the organization can no longer get the wall donated. The organization can try to fundraise for a \$10,000 donation, but Mr. Webberly requested that the RAAC support funding the wall project.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION (follow up) - Reading Food pantry to present amended request and RAAC discussion on same:

Vanessa Alvarado presented the amended ARPA request for the Reading Food Pantry based on the Committee's feedback. The total amended request is \$84,600 for \$12,000 for 2 industrial size refrigerators, \$57,600 for gift cards for three years, and \$15,000 for a space consultant to help identify space within Reading that is accessible to neighbors. There is \$25,000 earmarked by the state for future construction, but it is not yet guaranteed, and the Food Pantry cannot count on it until the money is actually received. The \$57,600 for gift cards anticipates having more neighbors in need over the next three years.

DISCUSSION - RAAC member Andrew Grimes to give his allocation recommendations homework to add to overall spreadsheet; RAAC members to continue overall discussion on requests received with focus on areas of significant disagreement or more info needed in spreadsheet allocation recommendations:

Committee member Andrew Grimes was unable to attend this evening's meeting. The Committee was able to continue their discussion without his recommendations. Mark Dockser advocated for additional funding toward a new Senior Center and activities, and affordable housing. Chris Haley advocated for Birch Meadow, as ARPA funds are limited, and Birch Meadow has been waiting for a decade. Tom Wise and Joe McDonagh agreed with Birch Meadow, as the survey indicated a need for more recreation and the project is more shovel ready than a senior center, and Mr. Wise stated that his other priority is water based on survey responses and its alignment with ARPA restrictions. Geoffrey Coram agreed with Mr. Wise, and noted that Town Meeting voted to use ARPA funds for the water tower, and expressed his concern on funding the Imagination Station parking lot at Birch Meadow. Shawn Brandt noted that the Imagination Station parking lot is about creating safe accessible parking and managing stormwater. He also noted that he initially recommended allocating \$100,000 for affordable housing, but now feels it is premature to do that. He also noted that a lot of ARPA funds have already been allocated for water and sewer, and use of free cash would be a more appropriate use for the water tower. Marianne Downing noted that ARPA might not be able to fund it all, but could fund a little of a lot.

Most Committee members agreed that premium pay for essential workers should be considered, though Joe McDonagh stated that while he does not take the work of essential employees for granted, there were many people who faced hardships and were not compensated, and he favored other priorities based on community input and investing in the community for the future. There is more discussion and data needed surrounding the time frame to be considered, what amount or percentage of ARPA funds should be allocated, and the number of employees eligible. Committee members Shawn Brandt and Tom Wise were tasked with creating a formula to assist with allocating which employees might be awarded funds, and how much. Marianne Downing stated she would try to gather the head counts of employees by month.

Discuss future agenda items

The Committee discussed and agreed on August 31st, September 6th, and October 12th for future meeting dates. At the next meeting on August 31st, the Committee agreed to invite back the YMCA and AFSCME to further discuss their requests.

Review/Approve minutes from 7/13/2022 meeting:

The Committee reviewed the minutes from the July 13, 2022 meeting, and requested a minor edit.

On a motion by Mark Dockser, and seconded by Shawn Brandt, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 7-0-0 to approve the meeting minutes of July 13, 2022 as amended.

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

On a motion by Tom Wise, and seconded by Mark Dockser, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 7-0-0 to adjourn at 11:17 pm.

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