

Chester ARPA Committee Minutes for 4/11/22 Zoom Meeting

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM

2. Seating of Members

Committee members present: Allison Abramson, Kris Pollock, Bill Bernhart, Steve Cline, Michael Cressman, Kim Megrath, Jon Joslow, and Susan Wright. Rick Nygard was also present. Charlene Janacek, Andrew Gardner, and Mike Jordan were absent.

3. Approval of minutes from 3/8/22 – motion made by Steve Cline, seconded by Michael Cressman. Unanimously approved.

4. Approval of minutes from Special Meeting on 3/22/22 – motion made by Steve Cline, seconded by Jon Joslow. Unanimously approved.

5. Audience of Citizens

There was no discussion.

6. Proposal status summary

Kris Pollock reviewed the current status of proposals submitted to the Committee using the tracking spreadsheet. To date, of the \$1,246,840 ARPA-SLFRF allocation, \$321,480 has been approved at Town Meeting, with \$925,360 remaining. There are 5 proposals pending our approval totaling \$276,070. This would leave a total of \$649,290 for future proposals.

7. New Business

A. Sub-Committee Report – Social Services

Susan Wright is reaching out to other segments of Chester not covered by the two pending Social Services proposals.

B. Sub-Committee Report – Proposal Process

The sub-committee reviewed the draft process ideas that have been developed to date. These include a rough cut percentage allocation of ARPA funds across 7 categories as noted in the table below. These, in combination with the tracking spreadsheet, are a management tool to guide allocations going forward.

Category	%	\$
Infrastructure	27%	\$ 336,650
Social Services	22%	\$ 274,300
Economic and Cultural Development	20%	\$ 249,370
Public Safety	12%	\$ 149,620
Technology	10%	\$ 124,680
Water & Sewer	8%	\$ 99,750
Administrative Expenses	1%	\$ 12,470
	100%	\$ 1,246,840

The proposed review process is as follows:

The ARPA committee will review each application for the following criteria:

1. Beneficiaries of Town - How many of Chester's residents will benefit from the project?
Are the beneficiaries at risk or a special need population residing in town?

2. What is the positive impact to the Chester community - what is sustainability of project?
3. On-going expenses – will there be on-going expenses associated with the project extending beyond the ARPA allocation?
4. Reiterative funding – were there other Covid relief funds available and/or utilized on similar projects/needs within our community? Are there currently other programs/grants/funding available for similar projects/needs within our community?
5. Does the project support the Chester POCD?

Each criteria will be scored with a value of 1 – 5.

An initial open period of 60 days (April 15 to June 15) was proposed to accumulate proposals for review and comparison. A scoring matrix is also being developed, presuming that there will be an adequate number of proposals to be evaluated. Subsequent proposal submissions would be evaluated on a rolling basis.

Discussion:

Percentage allocations were discussed and generally accepted as guidelines that could be adjusted as needed.

There was concern about delaying action on proposals already received as some are time-sensitive, addressing urgent community needs, particularly for social services. It was generally agreed that the Committee needs a foundational structure and method for evaluating and comparing proposals that provides documentation of our decision process, demonstrates our due diligence, and results in expenditures that are aligned with ARPA-SLFRF eligibility criteria.

Jon Joslow expressed concern that our process allow the time for the development of strategic proposals. The EDC needs the time to do this. Funds do not need to be committed until 2024, and spent by 2026. EDC will be taking the time necessary to submit impactful proposals that use the POCD as criteria as they feel it is their fiduciary responsibility.

Allison Abramson noted that reaching out to Chester partners to develop additional social services proposals will take time.

Michael Cressman stated that the Social Services Fund is needed now to meet the urgent needs of 75-100 households – waiting for a 60 day window would delay providing needed assistance.

There was discussion on the inclusion of the question about alignment with the POCD. In the end it was agreed that we should not penalize a proposal if it is not explicitly tied to the POCD action items. Social Services

It was generally decided that the process would be changed to a rolling process to give the Committee the flexibility and time to best manage the expenditure of ARPA funds to meet current needs and strategic opportunities.

Kim Megrath noted it is important that our profile or portfolio of proposals represent the needs of the Chester community. For this to happen we need to broaden engagement in the ARPA process, not only to get actionable requests for funding but to inform the community about ARPA opportunities and give them confidence that the Committee is acting on their behalf.

So, what community input are we seeking, how do we get it and in what form, and what do we do with it when received?

Susan Wright stated that there are many options for communication: the website, email, postcard mailing, etc. She questioned if there was a process to maintain the quality of the town-wide email list. The town uses Constant Contact as a town-wide email platform. Analytics should be available. An informational meeting on ARPA would be a good forum for getting input on new proposals and giving an understanding of the process being used for ARPA to build public confidence in the Committee. Susan has been reaching out to potential beneficiaries of ARPA funding such as the Veterans.

Steve Cline noted that when we reach out to the public we need to have a structure and evaluation criteria for their involvement, otherwise it will be chaotic. We should present proposals processed to date within this structure

There was discussion on the use of a scoring matrix that Allison is developing. It would be most valuable if we have a significant number of proposals. Should we put the matrix on hold until we have more community feedback and a profile of requests? Allison believes that developing the matrix will help define our priorities and what we are trying to accomplish. Bill Bernhart would like to continue with matrix development as it should be of value to our overall process.

In summary, Bill Bernhart suggested that we focus our efforts on an informational meeting as our best effort to reach as many segments of the community as possible, give them an understanding of the objectives, and to get their engagement. Continue to develop our process and adjust as needed in response to feedback and activity. Move proposals forward to show that we are active, and use the approved proposals for publicity. Perhaps this will create some community interest. If possible, any proposals that we move forward may be included in the Town Meeting for vote.

8. Discussion and Committee Disposition of ARPA Proposal Submissions

- Social Services Fund - \$100,000
- Tri-Town Youth Services Bureau - \$44,820
- ARPA Committee Administrative Expenses - \$5,250
- Chester Public Library - \$6,000
- Town Hall Generator - \$120,000

The TTYSB proposal is a regional initiative. Essex has approved funding and Deep River will vote at next Town Meeting.

There is a question regarding using ARPA money to reimburse for contractor work if ARPA money is not available in time to pay invoice. Bill to check with accountant.

The Committee voted unanimously to move all 5 proposals forward to the Boards of Finance and Selectman after a motion by Jon Joslow, seconded by Michael Cressman.

The next meeting of the ARPA Committee is on Monday, May 9. The date for public hearing on the Town Budget is May 10. The Town Budget Meeting is May 24. The Board of Finance meets on May 19. An ARPA informational meeting is to be scheduled at some point. This will involve a postcard mailing and preparation of a presentation for the event. The information session may need to wait until after the budget meeting due to meeting load in May. To be discussed with Charlene after her return on May 1.

9. Audience of Citizens

Kim Megrath noted that there is a deadline of April 30th for Chester to declare acceptance of ARPA money for Lost Revenue using the \$10MM exclusion vs calculation method. The first annual report is also due at that time. Bill to follow up with First Selectman and Accountant the week prior. They are aware of the requirement and are working on gaining access to the reporting system.

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 PM.