

**To the Board of Finance Members.**

**I regret I am unable to attend tonight's BOF Special meeting called yesterday afternoon. I request this letter be officially read into the minutes. Below please find an outline focused on the critical importance of the Chester Community Partnership ARPA funding request. First, I would like to clarify that the Treasury Guidelines do not require the Town to have the 1.2million ARPA funds in hand before going to a Town vote as the Treasury specifically allows for ARPA proposals to be voted on as the funding is guaranteed to our town. And as you know ARPA funding is NOT Chester taxpayers monies, but Federal grant funds (a gift) being allocated nationwide. And as you know the BOS unanimously voted in favor of this ARPA proposal to fight food insecurity.**

### **Background**

The Chester Community Partnership (CCP) was created by the Town of Chester in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic downturn.

- It has been designed as a mutual aid collaborative with the goal of assisting the community and Chester's social services department.
- CCP has organized 30 volunteers in the spirit of solidarity and reciprocity.
- CCP has been and will continue to build networks/programs to support ("raise-up") ALL members of the Chester community, especially those in need.
- The focus of CCP is on meeting the basic needs of households in six areas: food, housing/utilities, mental health/health, transportation, childcare, and technology.
- The Chester Food Program reflects the commitment of the community to address food insecurity, which is a serious public health problem.

### **Statement of Purpose**

**Request:** The Town of Chester/Chester Community Partnership is requesting a total of \$100,000 from the *American Rescue Plan Act, Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds* (ARPA-SLFRF), \$25,000/year for the next four years (FY23, FY24, FY25, and FY26) to support the Chester Food Program, which targets households **impacted** or **disproportionately impacted** by the COVID-19 public health emergency, as defined by the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

- The Chester Food Program will be run by Chester Community Partnership (CCP) in collaboration with the Town of Chester through FY26 (June 30, 2026).
- CCP has been and will continue to be responsible for coordinating the program, managing the pantry (e.g., stock/label items, maintain inventory, identify/shop sale items), recruiting and training volunteers, organizing volunteers into teams (e.g., shoppers, baggers, and curbside), generating the shopping list from inventory, creating the team schedule, and communicating/posting assignments each week.

- The Food Program will target the Chester households presumed by the Treasury to be **impacted** or **disproportionately impacted** by the COVID-19 pandemic (which includes ALICE households as it specifically meets the Treasury Guidelines).
- Residents are and will continue to be asked to show a photo ID to confirm Chester residency, and to obtain a public access sticker and display the sticker on their car, if they have one.
- The Food Program will be open from 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM on Tuesdays at the Town Hall and will be held in either the Community Room or curbside in the corner of the parking lot, depending on the weather and the time of year.
- Patrons who are unable to visit the Food Program on Tuesday evening may request to pick-up their groceries in the Town Hall pantry during regular business hours, 9:00-4:00, Monday-Thursday and 9:00-12:00 on Friday. Home delivery will also be available.

**Fiscal Accountability: Chester Community Fund**

In the past year, the CCP has taken action to create a sustainable model to address food insecurity in our community. In FY22,

- CCP carefully monitored the Chester Food Program by *managing the pantry* (e.g., stock/label items; maintaining inventory; generating the shopping list from inventory; identifying/shopping sale items, when possible; and standardizing the regular- and family-size perishable and non-perishable bags of food) and measured outcomes by *collecting and reporting data* on the number of households served, the number of bags of food distributed, the cost of groceries, and total annual amount expensed from Chester Community Fund for the Chester Food Program.
- All expenditures from the Chester Community Fund are approved by Social Services Director or the First Selectwoman. And CCF had \$6,000 in it as of July 1, 2022.

FOOD				Transportation		Housing	Utilities		Health/Mental Health	Child care	Technology	Other
CCP	Gift Cards	Holidays	Other	Public	Gas Cards		Fuel	Electric				
\$24,116	\$3,810	\$1,039	\$227	\$915	\$690	\$1,225*	\$3,528*	\$584	\$2,099	\$3,340	\$0	\$2,787

\*Includes \$1,325 dispersed to 2 households who may meet eligibility criteria for ARPA SS Program. First Selectwoman was notified of these discrepancies in a meeting with Dr. Megrath on July 28, 2022.

**Chester Community Fund  
July 1, 2021- June 30, 2022**

\$35,219.74	Starting Balance
\$15,792.80	New Revenue- 75% directly allocated for food

<b>\$51,012.54</b>	<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>
\$44,359.89	TOTAL EXPENSES- 54% <i>Chester Food Program (\$24,116)</i>
<b>\$6,652.65*</b>	<b>BALANCE end of FY22</b>

*\*August 11, 2022: First Selectwoman reported in an email to Dr. Megrath that there was an overdraft in the amount of \$13,000 in the Chester Community Fund.*

## Reporting

- The Pantry Manager has and will continue to conduct and maintain a weekly inventory of non-perishable items in the pantry.
- The Coordinator will prepare the shopping list, including any non-perishable items that are out of stock and perishable items scheduled for distribution that week.
- All items will be purchased on sale, when possible. CCP grocery receipts will be submitted to the Account Manager who will record the transaction and debit the proposed *ARPA Chester Food Program Fund*. CCP will be responsible to monitor the budget for the proposed *ARPA Chester Food Program Fund* (\$25,000/year) by requesting a quarterly expense report from the Accounts Manager and making any adjustments to the budget, if necessary.
- Data from the Food Program will continue to be recorded on a spread sheet by public access sticker or street address for residents with no car (or public access sticker) to protect personally identifiable information. A legally binding Privacy form was also implemented for signature to protect confidentiality and personally identifiable information.
- The CCP will continue to summarize the types of assistance (e.g., number of bags of food, diapers, Dignity Totes) by public access number or street address each week and email the information to the First Selectwoman and the social worker.
- Chester’s social services director is responsible to enter the information into Charity Tracker, which is the social service data system. Further protecting confidentiality.
- The social worker will run an annual report for FY23, FY24, FY25, and FY26 to document the assistance provided by the Food Program.
- A report will be made available quarterly to the Board of Selectpersons, or the Board of Finance, upon request.
- Data is to be submitted for the Town of Chester Annual Report to include: type of assistance, number of households served, and expenses/cost of the Food Program. Below please find the backgrounds of the two incredible women leaders that have significantly improved our social services department and resources and worked without praise to provide help to those most in need.

## Qualifications

**Kimberley Megrath, PhD, Chair Chester Community Partnership**

Dr. Megrath holds a Master of Business Administration and Ph.D. Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education. She has over 40 years of experience in administration, practice, teaching/training/technical assistance, and research in early intervention and early childhood education/special education. Dr. Megrath is an expert in designing, implementing, and evaluating comprehensive, coordinated, culturally appropriate high-quality systems of care in early childhood and family-centered practice. Dr. Megrath has authored and/or managed grants of more than \$7.5 million in funded projects. She retired as an Associate Research Scientist from the University of Florida in 2018, one of the nation's top-five public research universities (U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges, 2022).

**Allison Abramson, MPA, Coordinator, Chester Food Program**

Allison is the Executive Director of Tri-Town Youth Services, a local 501c3 organization providing programs and support to children, youth and families in Chester, Deep River and Essex. She brings over 20 years of Nonprofit Management and Fund Development experience to our community and is passionate about empowering families. Prior to moving to Chester, Allison was Major Gifts and Grants Manager for the Rhode Island Community Food Bank, an organization combating hunger and food insecurity in Rhode Island through a network of over 400 small food pantries and meal sites operating throughout the state. In her role, Allison cultivated relationships with individuals, corporate marketing and community relations departments and private foundation managers to secure financial contributions for the organization's \$7 million budget. In addition to overseeing a year-long schedule of grant proposals and reports and coordinating outreach activities for the Executive Director and Development Team, Allison created opportunities to build the capacity of local food pantry member agencies, providing training on organizational management, budgeting, grant writing and reporting. These professional development opportunities advanced leadership skills throughout the network and helped member agency food pantries secure larger donations for refrigeration and freezer capacity. Even in the early 2000's the best practices for charitable food programs were changing nationwide, moving away from antiquated models of food closets with supermarket discards, toward an empowering shopping experience that reduces food insecurity through the provision of fresh, nutritious perishable food, while simultaneously preserving patrons' dignity and connecting them to additional services and supports available within the community to address the root causes of hunger.

**I respectfully request that the BOF move to approve the allocation of \$100,000 from the ARPA-SLFRF to the Town of Chester/Chester Community Partnership for the Chester Food Program to be distributed in \$25,000 increments beginning in FY23 and ending in FY26. The release of funds in subsequent fiscal years will be contingent upon the submission of a Chester Food Program Annual Report, and brought to a Town Vote.**

**Thank you for your consideration,  
Lori Ann Clymas  
Chester Taxpayer  
Community Partnership/Food Program Volunteer**