

**Town of Richmond ARPA Committee
Minutes for the meeting of February 9, 2022
Town Center Meeting Room and via Zoom**

Members Present: Josh Arneson, June Heston, Connie Bona, Rebecca Starks, Jay Furr, Jeff Forward

Members Absent: Molly Dugan, Ellen Kane, Linda Donovan

Others Present: Kendall Chamberlin, Water and Wastewater Superintendent. Kristen Hayden-West

Call or Order: 4:00pm

Welcome by Furr.

Furr: Reviewed agenda.

Hayden-West: I am on the Richmond Housing Committee and am here to listen and see what the conversation is as housing is an allowable expense of the APRA money.

Forward: Do you have any ideas on how the ARPA money could be used for housing?

Hayden-West: We are just starting to look into this but it can be used for affordable housing.

Review and discussion of the Jericho ARPA survey

Furr: Reviewed the items on the survey.

Heston: I found the survey to be very complicated. It is using language from the ARPA document, which makes sense, but it is written at a grade 13.6 level and that will bias the responses because there will be people who do not know that it means. The survey should be redrafted to be written at an 8th grade level which is pretty standard for these types of documents.

Forward: I think these questions could be simplified. I found the exercise quite challenging. I would hope that the survey is not the only tool that we use to collect information. I hope we also do a series of hearings that would be focused on specific populations in the community. The questions could be make simpler. Questios could be simpler such as “support public health”, “address negative economic impacts”, “support low income communities”, “support businesses”.

Bona: I would rather see this be a rating system from one to six on a level of importance. This does not address the issue of understanding, but it helps to rank the items.

Heston: I like that idea.

Starks: Were you saying rank them 1-6 or rank each on a scale of 1-10?

Bona: Either would work.

Starks: Ranking them individually 1-10 would give more information.

Heston: I like the 1-10.

Forward: I don't see investment in municipal buildings as a category.

Heston: We could add that.

Furr: We could make our own categories.

Heston: We can follow the categories, but word it in a way that is better understood by more people.

Forward: How do we edit this?

Starks: I could look at the rule and try to re-write this. I do worry that if you give examples that would limit some peoples thinking.

Forward: In some respects number one and two are similar. While the questions group businesses and individuals together and I think they are different.

Bona: I would add "not covered by health insurance" for the public health category. This helps to give people a direction.

Forward: This is once in a lifetime money and I look to this as an opportunity to do a legacy project. I do want to help people who have been adversely affected as quickly as we can. We don't want any businesses to fail while we are figuring out what to do with this money, or for anyone to lose their house. But, I also think we could use this money for projects that will be around for a long time.

Farr: Housing is a possibility but we need to get specific on what we could do for housing with this money.

Bona: I'd love to be able to help a specific business or person or family. But we will have to be very open minded and non-judgmental. Some people who are behind on taxes are perpetually behind and it does not have anything to do with the pandemic.

Forward: Maybe town government is not the right body to decide on who gets the money. Maybe a non-profit is a better option.

Bona: The Town has worked with groups that provide money to those in need on a one time basis and Martha Laing helped to distribute this money so she may be able to help.

Heston: The community outreach will help us understand if people even rank that type of spending as a high priority.

Forward: We should try to spend this money where it can be levered with other funds. We could also spend it on upgrades in qualified items for the Town Center.

Furr: I am grateful that Rebecca will take a first stab at rewriting this.

Stark: How can we edit this outside of a meeting?

Arneson: You can send it to the whole committee but we all have to hold our comments until the next meeting. But less than five members could work together on this outside of a meeting.

Review of Richmond demographic data

Furr: The Census has set up a site called [Census.data.gov](https://www.census.gov/data) There are tables of data specific to Richmond. Each table has specific information in it and you could take a lot of time pouring over the data. Are there specific sets of information that we need to focus on?

Forward: The demographic I am most interested in is the percentage of low and moderate income folks and where they are located. Racial demographics are also interesting.

Furr: I will see if I can find granularity beyond the zip code.

Forward: CCRPC may be able to help with the data. I would like to know where are the pockets of low and moderate income folks and how do we find them to ask them how they are doing. Linda Donovan may be able to help with some of this.

Heston: Other than Riverview Commons there may not be pockets. Do we ask an income level question on the survey so we have a sense of the income brackets that the survey reaches and then we can reach out to income brackets we missed with the survey.

Forward: We may not need to know some of the demographic questions such as gender.

Starks: Age is relevant and so is race.

Bona: You could ask questions on if your household has had COVID.

Heston: I don't know if we need to know if households have had COVID.

Furr: I would like to know if a household has lost income due to COVID. This may help us find impacted populations.

Starks: Originally we were looking for demographic information to let people know the make up of our town, but it may also be helpful to see who the survey is reaching.

Discussion of groups to reach out to directly for feedback

Furr: What groups should we be contacting.

Forward: I talked to Western Slopes and was told it is disbanding. Maybe a better way to reach the business community is to ask individually. Some businesses may be doing fine such as my dentist who said he was doing okay. Restaurants may be hurting. The multinational gas stations are probably fine. But hardware store and grocery store may be good to talk to.

Bona: You may be able to get good input from various business owners.

Forward: We could divvy up businesses for people to reach out.

Arneson: I think talking to people in groups may be more efficient than one on one conversations. I also think we need to reach out to kids from elementary school through college age.

Heston: We could get on the agenda for PTO meetings and school boards. But we need to be organized and the survey will help us identify who to reach out to.

Discussion of ways to reach out to the public in addition to a survey

Furr: I have heard people mention focus groups. What other ways could we reach out.

Forward: There could be many focus groups. We could talk to parents, spiritual leaders, business owners, non-profits and more.

Furr: The churches could help us distribute the survey to their congregations.

Heston: An open forum would be good in addition to focus groups with specific people.

Hayden-West: Childcare providers would be good to reach out to.

Furr: We can use Front Porch Forum to reach out.

Starks: Are the non-English speakers who we need to reach?

Furr: Migrant populations may be hard to reach.

Starks: Migrant Justice may be able to help.

Furr: The Food Bank may help.

Hayden-West: The school may be able to help.

Forward: We can refine our community engagement plan with the notes from the meeting today.

Hayden-West: We should reach out to non-school age people with disabilities as well.

Discussion of using \$22,700 for Broadband expansion

Furr: Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom is seeking a grant from Vermont Community Broadband Board. In addition to the grant, Richmond can use \$22,700 of ARPA funds to be matched from VCBB. This is first come first serve money, so this money would need to be spent soon.

Heston: I think it is pre-mature. I could not see if there was an application deadline for the grant. I don't think we are ready to make decisions. Broadband is important but we don't have a mechanism in place to ask people what they think. I don't want people to think we are spending money before we get feedback, and devalue the feedback.

Forward: There is not a lot of information in the email. The Governor's budget has a lot of money for broadband so this may not be the right time to spend the funds this way.

Starks: I agree, it is premature.

Arneson: I reached out to Roget from Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom for more information so see if we used ARPA money for this, would that money and the match from VCBB be give to Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom to continue their work on broadband.

Heston: We should leave it at it is too premature in our process to commit to this.

Discussion of further guidance from VLCT

Furr: VLCT said to sit tight, and further guidance will be out. But their sight still does not have many revisions on the page for the final rule. The site does discuss the \$10 million revenue loss allowance and other questions that the public may ask. This is a good page to keep an eye on.

Forward: There was a presentation I went to recently from VLCT and it was great. Ted Brady from VLCT was very instructive. Katie Buckley from VLCT is also a great resource for questions on ARPA. I suggest we all read the VLCT website before the next meeting and see what we can learn.

Topics for next meeting:

- Review updated survey
- Continue to discuss community engagement

Chat from Zoom

00:45:58 kristen: Small home businesses not big enough for other funds

00:49:08 kristen: Child care

00:50:48 kristen: Fpf

00:52:17 kristen: School might know language stuff

00:52:42 kristen: Non school age with disabilities