

Town of Richmond ARPA Committee
Minutes for the meeting of April 12, 2023

Members Present: Cara LaBounty, Jay Furr, Jeff Forward, Mary Houle, Molly Dugan, Rachel Lohia
Thomas Lyle

Members Absent: Eric Svensson, Josh Arneson

Others Present: Duncan Wardwell (Assistant to the Town Manager), Linda Parent (Town Clerk), Amy Channell, Andy Bessette, George Gifford, Harland Stockwell, Heidi Bormann, Jessie Heiser, John Linn, Karen, Lisa Kory, Lisa Lavoie, Lisa Littwin, Martha Waterman, Trevien Stanger

Call or Order: 7:00pm

Welcome: Furr

Public Comment:

Heiser: Hi, I am Jesse Heiser and I live here in the Village. I appreciate the efforts of people who are here and serve throughout our Town. I sent a letter to this Committee a week ago, outlining my deep concerns about the proposal for the redesign of Volunteers Green that has new infrastructure and hard surfaces. I have deep concerns about the paved path, the paved basketball court, a gaga pit, a pavilion, and an expanded section of mats at the playground instead of grass and wood chips. Please do not recommend changes to Volunteers Green surfacing or infrastructure to the Selectboard for ARPA funding before getting extensive community input. We need to consider the environmental impacts of a total of an acre of paving in a floodway, not just floodplain. Hard surfaces, unlike vegetation, can't absorb runoff, snow melt or pollutants. It also requires upkeep. If there are ways to navigate around floodway or floodplain regulations, it doesn't mean that we should. When a small group of individuals make assumptions about what the community wants to change in Volunteers Green for decades, it would not be responsible without broad and substantial community input at the visioning stage. It's not a derelict or insufficiently used green space. It is populated and enjoyed for its unique current open and largely uninterrupted configuration. I know there have been discussions over time about repairs to the existing Bandshell and addressing some unsafe existing components of the playground. Any new structures, mats or surfaces, I ask that you not recommend this proposal without significant input and involvement of the community at this stage before it goes any further.

Furr: I think your points are well taken. I'm glad you came to offer them. Anybody else like to make a public statement?

Channell: We all live in the Village as well. We are here for support and to make sure things are heard.

Littwin: When you add more structures, you add more things that will call more people, not just from our Village, but other Towns. We have issues that we have to think about. At night, we see cars driving and exchange through car windows little packets. It's also a concern for our safety.

Stockwell: As a person who put in most of that park, I do not feel that it needs to have paved paths. At one point we were going to put in a basketball/tennis court and you have to pass a lot of regulations. It got so expensive that it wasn't even worth it.

Furr: I validate everything you've said. I don't disagree with anything you've said.

Littwin: We were all flooded by Irene. We have been told by FEMA that we can't build on our property.

Furr: We can't build anything there either without Selectboard explicitly waiving our Zoning Ordinances. We would have to have extensive research and public comment. Nothing has been okayed whatsoever,

Stanger: Hi, my name is Trevien Stanger, I wrote a Front Porch Forum post two days ago. I was expressing a desire to not have the overall north star of this thing only be about recreation. Various parks in the County and throughout New England include things like community orchards, nature-based playgrounds, and pollinator gardens.

Furr: We've also created a Gardening Committee with the goal of increasing these opportunities in Town.

Additions or Deletions to Agenda: None

Items for Presentation or Discussion with those present

Review minutes of the 3/22/23 meeting: TABLED

Discussion of proposal from the Richmond Cemetery Commissioners

Furr: Linda Parent and Heidi Bormann are here from the Richmond Cemetery Commission.

Parent: The Richmond Cemetery Commissioners are presenting to the ARPA Committee that a four-foot-high fence be installed on four sides around the Village Cemetery located between Jolina Court and the Richmond Free Library. We feel this is important to provide a respectful and protected final resting place for many of our Richmond citizens. When the Jolina Court property was being developed, a fence was asked for, but the DRB decided against requiring the builder to erect it. We have had problems with the residents of the Creamery Apartments recreating in the cemetery. A properly installed fence would deter other vandalism to the Cemetery. I have noticed a lot of dogs there. A fence would deter people from cutting through the Cemetery. We have a proposal from F.E. Hart Fence of Williston for \$27,829. We have a proposal for installing that fence from Whites Fencing of Hinesburg for \$10,177.50. The stones in the Village Cemetery are in dire need of restoration and repair. We have an estimate of \$6,700 from James Woodman. We're proposing that the Cemetery Association cover 50% of the cost of this project and the ARPA funds used for a match of 50% of the project. This would calculate to \$22,353.25 of ARPA funds. In the past, the Cemetery Commission paid for the removal of three large trees in front of the Village Cemetery that were on Town property. I've included the overview of responsibilities of the Cemetery which includes fence repair and with respect to a fence around a cemetery.

Forward: I wonder if Duncan could look into whether or not our insurance covers any vandalism at our cemeteries. Also, what kind of fence?

Parent: It is a commercial grade like black wrought iron.

Bormann: It looks historically within the other characteristics of other Towns Cemeteries that we have.

Parent: It's made out of aluminum so it won't rust. We were thinking of putting the gate on the corner near the Library.

Bormann: I think it's very important to protect and keep that history.

Dugan: I see where it says if the Selectboard neglects to keep and repair the fence then there's a fine. The Cemetery Commission has the authority. It's not that the Town is derelict in not having a fence. It sounds like it's kind of a choice. Is the fence going to preclude people from walking in the cemetery?

Bormann: We're looking at a gate close to the Library. It's easy to access. We've also spoken to the Highway Department to make sure the lawn care can be accessed with their lawn tractor.

Forward: I would suggest that you come up with a design with some visuals and have a public hearing. I think the Cemetery Commission is the right one to be doing it rather than the Selectboard. I'm in favor of this proposal, I'm not trying to slow it down. It would be important to have some public input. If and when the Town Center is renovated the whole layout is going to be changed, including the parking lot. You might want to have some access from the back of the parking lot.

Labounty moved that the ARPA Committee recommend to the Selectboard the use of \$22,353.25 toward the fencing and improvements to the stones spent by the Cemetery Committee. Houle seconded. Roll Call Vote follows discussion.

Dugan: I would want to compare this proposal to the criteria that we have decided upon as a Committee.

Forward: I'm wondering if we can publish these criteria in some fashion.

Lyle: I suggest that we put the brakes on this for a bit. We're looking at these projects in a piecemeal fashion. It seems like we're dealing with these projects as they come up as opposed to running all the proposals at one meeting and prioritizing them. I believe I said this last time that we put a deadline that all projects have to be submitted by x date. A week after that, we go through each one-by-one and rank them.

Furr: I will display and read the criteria:

_Can be allocated by CYE 2024

_Can be spent by CYE 2026

_Can leverage other grants/funds with ARPA to invest in a capital investment/project that may have previously been out of Richmond's reach even during excellent economic times

_Proposed capital project/investment expected to be long-lived - 25+yrs

_Proposed capital project/investment generates future costs savings for town

_Proposed capital project/investment generates future "revenue" i.e. expands tax base

_Expected benefits of proposed capital project/investment can be widely shared and accessible to all residents in an equitable manner.

_Proposed capital project/investment may result in improved aesthetics, use and enjoyment of existing publicly held commons i.e. beautification of parks and buildings, town entry corridors

_Proposed capital project/investment may result in increased public safety

_Proposed capital project/investment may result in increased public wellness

From the standpoint of the criteria, this would certainly score high on the beautification. It would score high on the long life. We're being asked to only contribute half; the other half would be matched by the Cemetery Committee. We can certainly allocate by 2024, we can very likely get it completely spent by 2026. Future cost savings would be a little more nebulous, it would reduce vandalism. It's not going to create more revenue. It would be widely shared.

Dugan: I'm agreeing with Tom, I'm concerned about the process. You gave your opinion about whether it met the criteria. All of us on the Committee will have maybe the same opinion, maybe a different opinion. I think that is screaming out for a more measured approach by the Committee to get the projects into us and having a process where we talk as a Committee and use the criteria and weigh things. I'm not against this Cemetery proposal, but I'm not feeling like I'm ready to recommend it to the Selectboard, because of the process.

Lohia: What is the timeframe the Cemetery Committee is envisioning? Is there any urgency?

Bormann: Our thought is doing it sooner rather than later. If we could do it this summer, it would be ideal because if a potential sidewalk goes in then it is already protected.

Furr: I strongly disagree with what Tom says. Every meeting, we take two steps forward and two steps back. I think we're getting nowhere. I have a list of projects that we've discussed so many times. Every time we say we are prepared to go ahead and vote that we should not move so fast. I'm just one person. If that's going to be what the Committee consists of, we're not ready yet then I think we may have to find another Chair because I only have so many hours in the day,

Houle: I have to agree with you. Two steps forward, two steps backwards, that's no way to run anything. This area deserves protection. I think we need to protect the Cemetery. I can't really call it an asset, but it is a benefit to the Town, and the history of the Town.

LaBounty: I do agree with Molly about reading the 10 criteria every time I make a decision. I don't need to debate with you if it was 10 criteria or not. I can make that decision for myself by my vote. The longer we wait, the less likely we're going to have the time, or the materials or the ability to spend any of the money. So far, we've already recommended the repairs to the Library. The Cemetery, which is adjacent to the library, is a project that goes together before the sidewalks are put in. We can vote and it can pass or we can vote and we stopped talking about it. We're not all going to agree which ones should go in, which ones shouldn't.

Lohia: There's a question in the chat that asks if there is a place where I can look at the proposals? That was from Lisa Lavoie and I think the answer is no.

Furr: Anybody who has asked, I shared the link. It's not on the website. Duncan and I will take an action to link to the original survey document with all the 318 suggestions, the collated surveys, and our tentative project list.

Lohia: It seems like the last two meetings, all of a sudden someone came out of nowhere asking for money. The other five or six things that you've been debating since last year have been researched and brought before the Committee. I agree with Tom, can we set a date, no more proposals after our next

meeting. Otherwise, every single meeting, there's going to be somebody who brings a new proposal, we have to vote on it tonight. Let's do it all at once, set a hard fast end date.

Lyle: I think the Cemetery project is great for all the reasons that have been discussed but this is the first time I've heard it today.

Forward: I think this Committee has done excellent work. We've been meeting now for about a year and a half. We've had an excellent public engagement process. I don't feel like there's tremendous urgency to any of our decisions. I don't feel a particular urgency to make decisions on any one of these until they may be more fleshed out. There are a couple that are more urgent.

LaBounty: This is less than \$23,000. You can vote the way you want to vote. I feel my decision isn't going to change if they come up with three more estimates or a drawn-up design or visual with landscaping. I'd like to call the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Houle, LaBounty in favor. Dugan, Forward, Furr, Lohia, Lyle not in favor. Motion not approved.

Discussion of finalizing recommendation to Selectboard

Furr: I think we do need to review the criteria and have a list of projects that we can all look at and apply to criteria. We are working off three documents: the original list of suggestions, the collated list of suggestions, and a list of things with actual dollar amounts. We do also have the criteria. I'd like to have a motion to do exactly what Tom suggested and pick a day. I do know that we will be having a delegation from Richmond Elementary school in May.

Lyle: May 31.

Furr: I have a motion from Tom Lyle for May 31.

Dugan: I'll second because I want to discuss.

Forward: Some of these shoes are going to take a while to drop. We've received a notification of a grant for phase one of the Bridge Street sidewalk. There was some urgency on that one because of the grant proposal. The Town Center committee is meeting tomorrow night and we're finalizing our proposal for the ARPA committee. We won't have a specific number. We will not have those numbers for a few months. We do not have to commit this money until the end of 2024 and spend it till the end of 2026. If you want a Town Center proposal by the end of May, we might not have it.

Furr: My point was that we shouldn't have brand new proposals coming in, regardless of their dollar amount, by x date. We know you don't have specific dollar amount for the Town Center yet. We do have the suggestion of spending money on the Town Center and a general outline of what you'd like to do.

Forward: I would suggest that we do not have that on Volunteers Green and that's going to require quite a bit more time.

LaBounty: We've been talking about the Town Center since I started in November. We want a date for all projects with dollar amounts of estimates because we're not taking bids or doing RFPs. The Selectboard holds public hearings, they gather the environmental information, they gather the community input, they gather pieces that we're not the experts on. I'm at the point where if we've got to wait for a specific project to come up with its numbers, then we might as well stop meeting until that date when all of the numbers are on the table. I want to feel like we're moving something to the level where the Selectboard can hold public hearings, collect the information, and have the Town Planner start the process and do the work to see if that's what the community really wants. If the community doesn't want it, if the Selectboard doesn't want it, they have the time to make a decision in other directions.

Lyle: I'd like to retract my motion and restate a different motion. Let's say June 30, we can look at projects under \$25,000. We vote on those in July. This first tranche of projects, cap total spending at a number like \$200,000. The next tranche of projects needs to be submitted by September 30. We set a cap on the total amount of aggregate project spending of say \$300,000. I'm just throwing numbers out, it's more of a process. There's a deadline for all proposals to be before us. We vote on all the proposals all at once. The first tranche is smaller projects with the aggregate cap, and then we move on to the bigger projects that we need more detail on.

Furr: It needs to be phrased in such a way that we can actually vote on it.

Lyle: The motion is to set up two project tranches. The first tranche would be for all projects under \$25,000 to be submitted by June 30 and on an aggregate, we do not spend more than \$100,000. Tranche two will be a deadline date of September 30 for all projects under \$150,000 and on an aggregate spending of no more than \$250,000.

Furr: I'm going to vote against Tom's motion. We have been looking at a version of this spreadsheet. As projects have gotten a certain amount of support and we've gotten dollar amounts, I've added it to this sheet. We already have the Bruhn Grant for repair of Library exterior of \$150,000. We have the miscellaneous costs associated with printing, mailing and other stuff relating to the survey last summer of \$3,000. We have talked about two phases of sidewalk, the Bridge Street Complete Streets and a certain amount of Municipal Oversight. Then the Bridge Street East sidewalk, we got the TAP grant so the \$64,000 would leverage \$256,000. The repair of headstones and adding fencing and gate is in yellow because we didn't authorize it yet. We also have a request from Angelike at MMCTV and endorsed by Josh, but we've never discussed the \$10,000 for wiring the Conference rooms for audio and video. It would total up right now to \$578,862.25, leaving \$621,037.75. Those sidewalks are going to be built. The only question is how much of the money comes from ARPA and how much is coming from other sources.

LaBounty: I'm at the point where we have been letting people know that we're going to be making some decisions. Do you have another project that you have heard about or in mind? I'm confused why we can't start making decisions about the ones that are on the table. Even if we say allocate \$300,000 for the Town Center and \$300,000 for park improvements then the Selectboard makes the decision if they buy the new playground. This list isn't going away. Why do we have to wait till June?

Lohia: I like the May 31 deadline as no more new submissions and then we start making decisions in June.

Dugan: I do not know of any project I'm waiting for that I don't see on the list. We've all heard something's coming from the Town Center. There's all this stuff about park improvements. I appreciate Tom's creativity about the idea of tranches, I think it's going to overcomplicate the process. I'm more comfortable with having a deadline for projects. I would feel more comfortable with just giving us a little more time to say all the projects are here by the end of June.

Lyle: I do not know of any of any other projects that are coming down the pike. I was trying to address if this Committee feels like they're ready to vote on everything on Jay's list except for what is colored purple. Let's vote next week, if you want to do that, and then we set up a timeline for the recreation, Town Center, and digitizing Town land records.

Dugan: That does not work for me, because there is a finite amount of money. I would rather wait until May 31 or June 30 to have at least an idea of the dollar amounts on the ones that are in purple. My preference is that we have some totality of these projects with some estimate of money before we then make decisions.

Furr: I'm comfortable with not voting for any of this money until the end of May. If we want to do a series of votes all at once at the same time, that's great. I'd like to accurately say this much is still wide open, this much we have a pretty solid idea.

LaBounty: The Town Center will have to go to a bond vote. My feeling is if we're going to allot some toward the project, we don't get to decide where it goes in the project. I want to move forward with the vote on things we know about.

Dugan: The Town Center Committee could come to us with an estimate of what we think we're going to ask from ARPA.

Furr: If we could have a number from the Town Center Committee by the end of June, that would be marvelous. If we don't, then we're in a position of saying this is the zone you're in because this is what we have left.

LaBounty: I don't want to wait till June. If the Cemetery can do the fence, you're going to push them out to later in the fall because of ordering materials and lining up labor.

Lyle: I say we hold a vote by May 31 on those items that are yellow.

Furr: The four things that are in yellow are the Bridge Street Complete Streets project, the Municipal Oversight, the Bridge Street East sidewalk match and the repair of headstones. The purple items are the unknown number of digitized land records, the Town Center and whatever we wind up doing with recreation. I think we're feeling comfortable to consider voting on the yellow items next time. I'm just asking us to move forward essentially on the yellow:

Category – Project – Amount needed from town

Transportation – Bridge Street Complete Streets - \$219,509

Transportation – Municipal Oversight - \$35,000

Transportation – Bridge Street East Sidewalk - \$64,000

Recreation – Misc recreation items - \$249,000

Cemetery – Repair of headstones, adding fencing and gate (50%) - \$22,353.25

Lyle moved to vote on the existing “yellow” projects with dollar amounts that have been presented to us at the next ARPA meeting. Dugan seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Dugan, Furr, Forward, Houle, LaBounty, Lyle in favor. Lohia absent for vote. Motion approved.

LaBounty: Can we talk about that date, so we know when we're voting?

Forward: April 26th is also a school vacation week and I am going to be out of town myself.

Furr: Does May 10th make sense to everybody?

Lyle: May 10th is for the vote on those items.

Future direction of ARPA Committee and Chair: TABLED

Adjourn

LaBounty moved to adjourn. Houle seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Dugan, Furr, Forward, Houle, LaBounty, Lyle, in favor. Lohia absent for vote. Motion approved.

Meeting adjourned at: 8:22 pm

Chat:

00:57:06 Lisa Lavoie: Is there a place where proposals are so that I can look at them>
01:03:33 Lisa Lavoie: I like the idea of setting a deadline then narrowing down the options.
01:12:57 Martha Waterman: Is there a Cochran Rd committee?
01:13:22 Rachel Lohia (she/her): I believe it falls under the transportation committee's auspices
01:30:00 Rachel Lohia (she/her): I'm sorry I need to head out for now
01:30:13 Rachel Lohia (she/her): I'll catch up the recording before next time