

**Town of Richmond ARPA Committee
Minutes for the meeting of January 25, 2023
Town Center and Via Zoom**

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

Members Absent: Eric Svensson, Jay Furr,

Others Present: June Heston, Lynne Knowles

Call or Order: 7:00pm

Welcome by Forward

Review minutes of the 1/11/23 Meeting

Lohia: On bottom of page two change where Jeff said “we decided to not set aside money so the grant funding is likely to be unattainable.”

Consensus is to review the video and bring the minutes back with edits to the next meeting.

Discussion of cost of transportation related items with the Transportation Committee

Arneson: Chris Cole sent a memo on the cost of projects this afternoon for the Committee to review.

LaBounty: We had asked them for a factual number of the project which was funded by a grant. Since we got this this information just prior to the meeting I would rather review this at the next meeting.

Forward: They had several recommendations for projects moving forward. The only project that is within the ARPA timeframe is the Bridge St. sidewalk project from Esplanade to the railroad crossing. The grant would require a 20% match from the Town but they did not have exact figures at the meeting.

Dugan: What confuses me in Chris’ email is that there are two projects that involve Bridge St. I don’t understand the difference.

LaBounty: It is two sections of the same project on the east side of Bridge St. They applied for a grant for the section from the railroad to Esplanade and the Selectboard has set aside the match for the grant. Their request was to use ARPA money in lieu of the grant and the Committee agreed that they did not like that idea. I want to read the numbers and keep moving forward.

Forward: This email seems like new information to me and I would like to understand what the Transportation Committee meant by this email.

LaBounty: Can Jeff reach out to the Committee with questions and bring answers back to us?

Consensus was to have Forward do this and Forward agreed.

Discuss criteria for evaluating feedback on ARPA fund usage

Forward: The feedback has been sorted into categories. We now need to figure out the criteria to evaluate the suggestions.

Lohia: Is the goal to split it or does it have to be the whole amount to one project or group?

Forward: It can be split or we can give all the money to one group or idea. But we do not decide we only make recommendations to the Selectboard.

Lohia: I felt like the Transportation Committee is asking for \$300,000 and the Recreation Committee is asking for less than that and the Housing Committee would like funding too. Is there an idea of if we could fund several different projects.

Heston: I think the criteria is set. It is in the guidance from the federal government. The VLCT talks about not spending money on project for which State ARPA funds could be spent. What matters most is will these ideas have no net effect on the budget moving forward and that you will focus on things like wellness. I think this Committee should look at what projects fit the criteria that has already been set. The ideas need to have costs associated with them when they go to the Selectboard.

Dugan: I am not sure that criteria has been set. We decided to accept it as lost revenue so that gave us more flexibility.

Heston: True, but there are still rules on ways that you cannot spend the money and guidance on how you should spend it.

Arneson: Accepting it as lost revenue does take some of the requirements off.

Heston: I was under the impression that the criteria was set but maybe that is not the case?

Forward: It has changed.

Heston: I think the only thing that changed is that you can use it for federal grant match.

Forward: You cannot use it for pensions or to directly lower the budget. You cannot put it into reserve funds.

LaBounty: June is talking about the guidelines. The Committee has talked about criteria for a few months. We can create criteria and then weight them and go through the suggestions. But if we truly have ideas as committee members that we think fit the guidance and that we think the community wants I don't want to go through criteria and weighting. We could look at all committee members' top five and then look at the distribution of funds. I think the Selectboard will then take this list and decide what their top projects are. I already have a gut instinct of the top five things based on the work so far.

Dugan: I hear that the process of criteria and weighting can be lengthy. I think we have received great input and we can find a middle ground. I think we have some criteria from previous meetings which we could document and then come back with our top five that we feel meet those criteria. I think a discussion could then get us to a consensus.

LaBounty: I agree with Molly and that was what I was trying to say. I want to hear everyone's top five and then decide as a group.

Lyle: I think it is important to come up with criteria and we already have a tab that lists items that have been stricken without an established criteria list. If we have a list of criteria that we can apply weighting to and rank them you can pretty quickly come up with four or five in a pretty objective way. I think we have to have criteria to follow through with the process. Projects that are long lived. Projects that are going to generate substantial savings in the future or generate additional revenues. Those are my top criteria. Think really big with this money. If there is a project that the Town has been thinking about for a long time this is the time to do it. What if all Town buildings became completely net zero? This is not my final idea but an example of the direction I'm thinking.

LaBounty: The other criteria were wellness and public safety. I think we should go no further than five criteria. I respect that Tom wants us to go through the process but the categorizing helped to combine projects. We can come up with criteria but the Selectboard's criteria may be totally different.

Dugan: I think the fifth criteria was about equitable access. We wanted to make sure it was open to as many people in the community as possible.

Heston: I would recommend going back and reading the ARPA guidelines. How we report it is very different since it is claimed as lost revenue. These criteria are defined in the guidelines. You should be keeping the timeline in mind on all the projects. We have a limited timeframe and the money has to be spent by the end of 2026.

Forward: We have talked about trying to use the money to leverage other funds. My understanding is that we can use this as a match for a grant.

Heston: That is also written out on the ARPA guidance.

Forward: Whether we state it or not we are all looking at criteria. The Selectboard needs to justify the decisions that are made. All the criteria discussed are useful.

Lohia: In the summary spreadsheet I created a tab and added the criteria.

LaBounty: The beautification part was included in public safety. The pay dividends can be built against the leveraging grants as they are saving or earning money.

Forward: It is a little different. One is to offset capital costs and one is to offset operating costs.

LaBounty: Saving money is still saving money.

Lyle: I am thinking that capital costs are different than expenses.

LaBounty: They are both spending money. What I'm saying is this is the same thought process which is to leverage grants or save money.

Dugan: I feel like one of the criteria is about generating revenue and the other is about saving money.

LaBounty: Tom said it was not just about earning money but also about reducing expenses.

Lyle: I think it is separate criteria. Leveraging grants helps to pay for the project and this is a capital cost. What happens after that is it will either generate revenue or save money. For example if you put in a capital investment into a building it could reduce a heating cost.

Heston: I am interested in the conversation because there is more than what you are talking about. One of the APRA guidelines is increasing the grand list. Revenue is a good word to use because you don't want it to cost you money. Savings are harder to predict.

Forward: If we could get a grant for a new playground that would reduce the capital cost. As opposed to paying for efficiency measures at the Town Center which would reduce capital expenses and operating expenses.

Lyle: Capital costs and investments are upfront costs that can be paid for with ARPA and ongoing expenses may also be reduced with this type of spending.

LaBounty: If we buy a capital item it saves us money in the future. Whether it has grant leveraged money or it saves us from a purchase in years to come it is the same idea of saving us money. The money net savings in a budget should all be grouped together. Whether it gets us grants or saves on future expenses it is all savings.

Heston: I would like to see you get the information of what we currently have in the capital plan that we know we have money coming in that we have to match. Tom and Cara are both asking how do we spend this money to save us money down the road. This would benefit everyone in the Town in the long run.

Forward: I would ask that somebody clean up the criteria page, perhaps Rachel or Tom. The other challenge is to review the Capital Plan. This should be an agenda item for a future meeting. I am still not convinced that capital costs are the same as reducing expenses or increasing revenue. The last thing I would suggest is are we just picking out projects or are we allocating a certain amount of money to each project.

LaBounty: I think it is a big ask to have the committee review the capital plan. I will look at every project with the criteria in mind realizing not every idea will meet the criteria. I am listening to the public feedback on this.

Forward: I think the capital plan is worth looking at.

LaBounty: I think Josh could do a summary.

Forward: I don't think Josh needs to do a summary.

Arneson: There is a narrative in the plan that is helpful.

Forward: Thank you all for your participation in this process. The Selectboard really values the feedback of committees.

LaBounty: Is there going to be time for the Town Center Committee to present?

Forward: Yes, let's put that on a future agenda.

Meeting adjourned at 8:05pm