



Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

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Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

Reading Arpa Advisory Committee

Date: 2022-03-08

Time: 7:00 PM

Building: Reading Community Television -RCTV Location:

Address: 557 Main Street

Session: Open Session

Purpose: Kick-off Meeting

Version: Final

Attendees: **Members - Present:**

Shawn Brandt, Geoffrey Coram, Mark Dockser, Marianne Downing, Chris Haley, Joe McDonagh, Tom Wise

Members - Not Present:

Andrew Grimes

Others Present:

Town Manager Fidel Maltez, School Superintendent Tom Milaschewski (remote), Town Accountant Sharon Angstrom (remote), School Director of Finance Susan Bottan, Assistant Town Manager Jean Delios (remote), Town Clerk Laura Gemme (remote), Finance Committee Chair Ed Ross, School Committee Member Erin Gaffen, School Committee Member Carla Nazzaro, School Committee Member Chuck Robinson, Select Board Chair Karen Herrick, Select Board Member Carlo Bacci, Nancy Ziemiak

Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Jacquelyn LaVerde

Topics of Discussion:

This meeting was held in-person at RCTV Studios, and remotely via Zoom.

As this was the first time this body met, Town Manager Fidel Maltez opened the floor for nominations for Chair. Chris Haley nominated Marianne Downing, seconded by Tom Wise. Geoffrey Coram nominated Mark Dockser, seconded by Shawn Brandt. By a show of hands, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 4-3 to appoint Marianne Downing as Chair.

Ms. Downing then opened the floor for nominations for Vice Chair. Shawn Brandt nominated Mark Dockser for Vice Chair, seconded by Marianne Downing. Tom Wise nominated Chris Haley for Vice Chair, seconded by Chris Haley. By a show of hands, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 4-3 to appoint Mark Dockser as Vice Chair.

Mr. Maltez presented background information on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the final rule that was handed down in February. Reading's total share of ARPA funds is \$7,592,234. There were originally five approved spending categories: public health; economic impacts of the public health emergency; lost public sector revenues; premium pay for essential workers; and water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure. The final rule gave towns the option to allocate a standard allowance of \$10 million in lost revenue to be used on government services, though the original categories are emphasized in the final rule. The Town Accountant will verify that any expenses are preapproved.

Neighboring communities are utilizing ARPA funds in different ways. The Wakefield Town Administrator held a presentation on Zoom, then a public forum and online survey to solicit

feedback from the community, then used that feedback to create his list of recommendations including: support and enhance outdoor spaces for COVID mitigation, investment in parks and other outdoor recreation spaces, digital marketing and job training, and expansion of public health services. Other surrounding communities are in a similar place as Reading, having started conversations, but have not made commitments on how to spend their ARPA funds. Arlington spent a lot of time developing a mission and identified a broad range of categories that encompass a wholistic framework. Mr. Maltez recommended that the RAAC develop "buckets" for spending categories that capture what they believe to be Reading's priorities. Community forums will be important along with community surveys to help identify Reading's buckets. The charge of the RAAC is to bring spending recommendations to the Select Board no later than October 31, 2022.

The Committee engaged in discussions for how often they should meet. Where Select Board and School Committee meet every other week, the Committee could take advantage of the off weeks and meet as often as possible before the summer. Community input is also important to gather as soon as possible. Following discussion, the Committee agreed on March 29th and April 12th for the next meetings.

The Committee compared the processes of other communities. Mr. Brandt cautioned about giving too much priority to community input, as they may not come up with needs and other budgeted items such as water infrastructure. Mr. Dockser noted that other things like affordable housing may not come from the community, but the Select Board may want to have a position on them. But the charge is setup to gather input from the broader community and understand community priorities. When the input comes back, the RAAC can figure out the priorities and how to fund them, whether using ARPA funds, free cash, grants, debt, or other funding opportunities.

Mr. Maltez reminded the Committee that the water tower came in over budget, and a decision on whether to use ARPA funds to make up the difference, or go back to Town Meeting to request long term debt, needs to be made by September.

With the arrival of Erin Gaffen and Carla Nazzaro, Tom Wise called the School Committee to order at 8:10 pm.

The Committee discussed future agenda items including: future meeting schedule, scope of deliverables, and timing of the survey and public forum.

On a motion by Shawn Brandt, and seconded by Chuck Robinson, the School Committee voted 5-0-0 to adjourn at 8:21 pm.

Roll call vote: Carla Nazzaro-Yes, Erin Gaffen-Yes, Chuck Robinson-Yes, Shawn Brandt-Yes, Tom Wise-Yes.

On a motion by Chris Haley, and seconded by Mark Dockser, the Select Board voted 4-0-0 to adjourn at 8:21 pm.

Roll call vote: Karen Herrick-Yes, Mark Dockser-Yes, Chris Haley-Yes, Carlo Bacci-Yes.

On a motion by Shawn Brandt, and seconded by Tom Wise, the Reading ARPA Advisory Committee voted 7-0-0 by show of hands to adjourn at 8:21 pm.