

TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES
Economic Development Committee
February 9, 2022

Present: Greg Shanahan, Chair
Lisa Belmarsh, Vice Chair
Gary MacDougall, Councilor
Christopher Heffernan, Councilor
Fred Happel, Councilor

Also Present: Ted Langill, Chief of Staff

Recording Secretary: Mary Barker

Chair Shanahan called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

American Recovery Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA)- Plans for Receipt and Expenditure of Funds

Chair Shanahan called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM and with all members present, for an informational meeting based on a referral requested by Councilor Belmarsh at the Council meeting of January 18, 2022. There were questions about the ARPA plan and receipt and expenditure of those funds, questions were turned over to the administration prior to the meeting and Mr. Langill was present to respond.

Mr. Langill provided an overview. the Council received a memo last month with a breakdown. The feds passed this bill will large sums of monies to municipalities across the county. Weymouth stands to receive money from two sources-one directly to the town and the other funneled through the county, in an allotment. The direct allotment to Weymouth is \$17.8 million and \$11.2 million coming from the county. It is received in two payments; half of the direct payment last year and the other half will be later this year. The interest earned so far on the first payment is \$30,000. The county payment will fall under the same rules for spending; it's just in a separate vehicle (requested, by project, through an online portal.) the town has through 2024 to allocate the money and through 2026 to spend it. The county will keep the interest money to pay admin fees (consultant to administer the portal). Having two processes and rules for the same money is a bit frustrating. The county money is for the bigger projects, and will be for fewer requests (the town can request up to 50% for a given project.) they don't look at it as a separate revenue; there are more needs than money, but they can address many of them with these funds. In addition to ARPA funds, there are additional funding sources within the town- the operating fund, free cash and an increased borrowing capacity. Interest rates are still good. The administration looks at this as a fluid, ongoing plan, as requests come in. The \$4 billion spending the state signed with earmarks to Weymouth will also create some opportunities for grant funding. No one has been hired to administer this, which is a lot, but it is a good problem to have. It's a matter of choosing the vehicle for a particular project and some are time sensitive. The majority of these funds and free cash

(some from the host community agreement) have yet to be spent. There are many projects and a lot of funding. The survey that was sent to the residents was a huge success, receiving over 2,000 responses.

Councilor Belmarsh asked about the funds targeted by Senator O'Connor and Representative Murphy. Mr. Langill responded that the town was not consulted on this bill or any of this spending; none of these earmarks were requested. Typically, an earmark in any legislative bill has a standard contract between the town and whatever state agency these projects come under and whichever town department the project benefits is the caretaker of that project. Some are reimbursement projects; others are direct payments with time constraints. Councilor Belmarsh noted it's \$600,000; there are a lot of funds from a variety of sources, and it's good to know what is coming in, to not duplicate or keep track of them. Mr. Langill responded that the town was not asked.

The role of the Town Council in ARPA- the administration asked in a memo last month for ideas, priorities and feedback. That is the partnership the administration seeks. The main difference is that in the budget process, measures come before Council; the ARPA money will not.

Regarding the survey--it was shared in multiple places, and with organizations and nonprofits, local papers (including an article in the Boston Globe). Response was hugely successful and they were extremely pleased with the results and feedback. Mr. Langill noted that by comparison, other recent surveys, including the Schools, Library, Farmers Market garnered less response than this one. Partly, it was a result of the outreach. It's a lot of money and it was good to get the feedback. They are looking for any means that's convenient for the Council to submit feedback. Everything in the survey was based on what the ARPA rules for spending.

Data on hardest hit by the pandemic - the rules themselves revolve around those who were hardest hit, by restricting what the funds can be expended on. Additional to those guidelines, there are ongoing efforts by the town to see where people were impacted disproportionately. All examples on the survey were taken from the ARPA guidelines. A couple have come up, such as food insecurity by the food pantry. Weymouth Food Pantry staff indicated food insecurity increased by 50% in MA during the pandemic. There is a larger impact with children and insecurity. Over 600 new families came into the program. To increase the availability of the program, Weymouth will have a mobile food pantry that will travel to where it's most needed, this is the first one in the state. The town is also working on behavioral health and substance abuse outreach by seeking partners, in South Shore Health and others to expand that aid to Weymouth residents.

Resident feedback- offered in four languages (same as what schools translate). The town does not intend to provide the raw data in order to maintain the confidentiality of respondents. It was broken down by zip code, race, age and gender and there isn't reason to provide individual responses. The goal was to get the input.

Town employees- the survey was intended for any resident, so it was not categorized as such. Department needs provide feedback through the Capital Improvement Plan.

Reporting- The town is required to complete quarterly reports and expenditures and any plans of future spending. The Council will get a copy of the reports.

Communications- the typical ones will be used- social media, town website, etc. Quarterly reports provided online will be a good resource.

Details on funding plan- those will be in the quarterly reports; some projects will be funding in other ways and will be in the form of a measure before Council.

County money and process- separate vehicle through a portal, but not separate money.

Host Community Agreement details- the expenditures covered a new fire engine and ladder, cost to demolish the Wharf Street property and design services for Beals Park. Copies of the measures are available through the Council office. The HCA is in the form of free cash, which requires a measure to expend.

Overlapping requests and multiple revenue sources- requests are made and administration determines the funding source for requests- borrowing, bonding, etc.

Timeline and chart- some towns and the county have hired outside consultants to design tracking charts; Weymouth will continue to use its typical manner. The administration will determine the funding sources. Because ARPA is a one-time source of revenue, priorities must be one-time projects, as is done with free cash. Braintree had to layoff employees because they used one-time sources of revenue that created structural deficits. Weymouth has avoided that and plans to continue to do so. The town has until the end of 2026 to expend the ARPA funds- any recurring costs would have to be sustainable beyond that point.

Councilor Shanahan replied that he is happy to see the reporting will be made available to the Council and the public. Mr. Langill noted that the Auditor has access to the system and can run reports for the Council.

Vice Chair Belmarsh noted the ARPA funds are a non-traditional means. She hopes they can come up with a process to use the money in the most efficient way for Weymouth. Traditional means- this is non traditional. Come up with a process. Use the money in the most efficient way for Weymouth and that satisfy what most want- and requires a lot more input. 2000 responses is only 3%, 10% of school population. There is plenty of time to do it. Get more input and be more transparent in how it's used. Make sure people can see how it's used. Treat it as a lottery win. Surrounding communities didn't get this much and it should be utilized in the best way possible. It is not clear to her how that will happen. Quarterly reports are fine, but she likes the way Boston and Cambridge, and Brookline have theirs set up. They don't necessarily have to hire a consultant but the money is available to do that. She would like to talk more about how to make this more

open. She is unsure how she can give ideas in a public way. How will a consensus happen?

Mr. Langill responded that the current annual budget is over \$200 million and is communicated openly to the public. The school survey was available as it was to the full community. There is plenty of time to figure out how to expend it.

Vice Chair Belmarsh noted part of the money for a bus for the food pantry. The COVID pandemic identified a large gap between the have's and the have-nots, but there is a large group within the gap who may not qualify for state or federal assistance, but may not have transportation and are finding it difficult getting to places. She submitted a suggestion in the survey for an inter-regional transportation system- a pilot program to help support the elderly, or students to get to school, etc. that would be the type of project which would come within the considerations in the ARPA. How does she get that out in the conversation?

Mr. Langill responded that he had a meeting with Farmers Market and Elder Services to expand transportation to the senior population in order to provide transportation to those programs. Funds have been committed, but not the source. There will also be a conversation with the schools, to consider bringing food to those who can't get to programs. Vice Chair Belmarsh said she brought it up to folks at Fairing Way. Mr. Langill responded that it is very expensive. Vice Chair Belmarsh asked how to continue the conversation to address all the needs. Mr. Langill responded they can't have a conversation about every need or they couldn't get anything done. They receive the ideas and then go out to the folks. It's more efficient to expand the programs they already have. They see a need with a program and address it, like with transportation to the Farmers Market for any senior in the town. Between the Farmers Market and the Weymouth Market, if they get a big response, then they'll create the program to address the need. The bus for the Food Pantry program is already \$200K, and will fill a bigger need. Vice Chair Belmarsh responded that they don't know that an inter-regional transit system is not economically feasible, since they haven't looked at it yet. Mr. Langill asked if she wants to create an MBTA in Weymouth? She responded yes. She noted this was in her survey and that is why she wants the raw data. Other people reading might have a different take.

Councilor Happel noted he's thankful they are having this conversation. He was concerned when the pandemic began and revenue sources dried. He also had a conversation with Representative Murphy about the same. Mr. Langill responded there was a period when revenues were down, but the administration was able to offset with measures. The overall impact was less than what was expected, and the town has rebounded fairly quickly, because they did a COVID budget with a grim scenario, which helped to rebound quickly. Weymouth is a self-sufficient town when it comes to budgeting. Growth is from local receipts, tax levy and internal transfers. Revenues are bouncing back.

Councilor MacDougall asked about the survey- it was a link to an online survey, and was printed out for seniors who had no access. Mr. Langill responded that the small amount- 400 people voted in the Councilor. Councilor MacDougall noted the survey was jaded to those who had access and that is the demographic of the response. Mr. Langill responded that there is a large senior response. Councilor MacDougall responded that the 3% of the town who responded is a small sampling. Mr. Langill added that the 3% is a bigger response to any survey previously; and this is a good result. Councilor MacDougall added to Councilor Belmarsh's point, you would want to target the needs to areas where the needs are disproportional. There is nothing more transformative to meet the needs than a "BAT" transportation system. A town like Weymouth of 60,000 and growing with urban professionals, would benefit from a transportation system. This is something that ten years down the road, will be noted as what changed Weymouth. A good portion of this is going to Columbian Square, and that's transformative, but he would ask the administration to look at the options already on the table for Columbian Square and funding it. At one point, Union Point was supposed to be paying for it. He wants the square completed, but would like things more for the whole town, like internet. He asked if most of the money is earmarked for larger projects. Mr. Langill responded that he looks at all the needs, but he wants to look at areas where they have not been able to address in the budgeting process. Columbian Square has been asked for, for many years, and this is a good project that's long overdue. This \$30 million, \$15 million in free cash and borrowing. If this money was not available they would look to borrow for the square. He looks at it like a county request. They are at the early stages, and still getting feedback. He knows the emotional impact will need to be addressed and they have these conversations with schools. An afterschool program is under consideration also. It's a rec program on school property. It's an ongoing item- opportunities for students and parents, and opening up some jobs-one program that checks a lot of boxes.

Councilor Heffernan noted this is revolutionary. There hasn't been an infusion like this in many years. He asked with the town preparing its budget, and is there any indication that the state aid will pull back on some of its aid? Mr. Langill noted the Governor's budget is out and he is hoping there are other opportunities created for the town; Chapter 70 and 90 funds are again disappointing. There is a lot of time left and a lot of money. Growth is what matters. If the revenues aren't growing the town is in a tough spot. Councilor Heffernan noted he was concerned when he heard the Governor's state of the state address that he is considering cutting taxes. He asked if the regional transit plan was in the Master Developer's plan for Union Point. Can the current developers consider it? Mr. Langill responded that the master developer is not at the point yet where they can address it. It's early stages with them. He reminded the committee that the town pays an assessment for MBTA over \$1million and there are ways to request expanded services. Councilor Heffernan noted there is a transportation "desert" in that section of town, so it would be good to discuss with the master developer. Mr. Langill responded that the master developer was also responsible for Columbian Square, but the town can't wait any longer.

Vice Chair Belmarsh noted there are developments going up all over town, and with parking restrictions it would be worth having the conversation with developers. This is

outside of the budget process. Mr. Langill responded that at some point you have to pay for the recurring costs. Vice Chair Belmarsh responded that maybe consider a 2-year pilot. If it does help, then find the money to pay for it. She noted that there was a need for behavioral health and substance abuse programs- what kind of services does that mean? Mr. Langill responded that it would be both services and expansion of programs, for residents that they are trying to help- they have good programs in place that they could expand upon, and are having a conversation with South Shore Health regarding partnership.

Vice Chair Belmarsh asked how would the public know what is happening? Would they know about it before it happens? Mr. Langill responded that they are having communication with the experts, and working with them to develop a program and then do the outreach. With regard to the new recreation program- there is already a program in place. Mr. Langill responded that they are discussing with school administration; Champions is more educational; this is more recreation. Vice Chair Belmarsh suggested increasing funding to existing arts, music and sports programs already in place, which would be beneficial to the families.

Councilor MacDougall asked if they are considering the infrastructure bill for funding coming in? Mr. Langill responded that the earmarks were removed from the bill; there are other grant opportunities for grant funding. Mr. Langill noted that the biggest is water and sewer infrastructure and is a separate part of ARPA. Councilor MacDougall suggested that the internet is the biggest hurdle for residents. When are the results for the study on broadband coming forward. Mr. Langill responded that the consultant is working on it.

Chair Shanahan suggested that the administration consider a public meeting for progress. Mr. Langill responded that they could do it at Annual Town Meeting.

Chair Shanahan will report out to the full Town Council on this issue.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:52 PM, there being no further business, Councilor Heffernan motioned to adjourn and was seconded by Councilor MacDougall. Unanimously voted.

Respectfully Submitted by Mary Barker as Recording Secretary

Approved by Greg Shanahan as Economic Development Committee Chair
Voted unanimously on 21 March 2022
attachments