

Katie Buckley's Advice about ARPA Expenditure Suggestions

6/14/22

These suggested uses for ARPA funds were made during the ARPA Committee meeting via Zoom on June 13, 2022. I sent this list to Katie Buckley, the VLCT's ARPA expert, and she discussed each idea with me over the phone on June 14th. Her responses are in bold print and italics, below.

- To increase access to broadband and high speed internet service.
We could use ARPA money for this, but it is not a wise use of our funds. The amount of ARPA money Windham has is a drop in the bucket compared to the cost of broadband connection. There is other federal money for broadband. Also the situation is rapidly changing. Google may be getting involved with a CUD in the NE Kingdom. If Google subsequently expands its service in other parts of VT, things could change a lot.
- To make capital improvements to the town's elementary school, such as a new floor for the all-purpose room, a new boiler, and/or better insulation.
This is tricky because the Windham School Board, not the town or the larger Supervisory Union, owns the building. "The Town could use its ARPA award to make capital improvements for the school however I would caution doing this... If the sentiment was strong to do this, then the Town could work with its Town Attorney and the school district to draft a right of first refusal for \$1, or if the school board decided to sell the property to a private entity, then the Town must be paid the amount it contributed to the capital improvements out of the proceeds of the sale. The document could be recorded in the land records so it will survive beyond those with the institutional knowledge of its existence and the Town's investment is protected and the benefit stays with the residents."
- To fund improvements to the town's historic Meeting House so that it can be used for more public and private events, such as weddings, family reunions, community festivals, etc. These improvements might include better insulation, compliance with fire regulations, and kitchen upgrades.

Yes, this is a legitimate use of ARPA funds.

- To better insulate the Town Office and improve the air exchanger.

This also is a legitimate use of funds.

- To make capital improvements to the Firehouse, such as better insulation and a more efficient heating system. Note: the Firehouse is not a town owned building.

This is a tricky issue. If the Fire Department is a 501c3 non-profit entity then ARPA funds could be used. If it is not, then it would be very difficult to use ARPA money.

- To offset the loss of revenue the Fire Department suffered because the annual barbeque and auction had to be canceled during the pandemic. Funds would be used to provide needed gear to volunteer firefighters.

Ditto. Only if it's a 501c3.

- To provide property tax relief to residents because school taxes have increased due to a pandemic fueled rise in real estate evaluations.

She would "not touch this issue with a ten foot pole." It raises all sorts of equity issues related to homestead and non-homestead tax payers. There is a surplus in the state's education fund that has been designated by the legislature and Governor for property tax relief. Stay away from this!

- To pay for town officials, or others, to attend a grant writing workshop.

Legitimate use of ARPA funds.

- To pay for plantings that would beautify the town, presumably in public places.

Legitimate use of ARPA funds if plantings are in public areas.

- To pay for an electric power line along Old Cheney Road dedicated solely to the transmission of solar power generated by several possible solar arrays along that road.

ARPA funds could be used but it would be very hard to justify because at best only a small number of people in town (the landowners renting their property and those who could afford to buy panels) would benefit from this. It would raise serious equity issues. Also, the line is likely to cost so much that the ARPA funds would not be sufficient. In addition, if the line were installed and the solar arrays subsequently were not built (due to economic issues, permitting problems, or some other reason) the funds would have been wasted. Not the best use of ARPA funds.

- To pay for some kind of social event to bring together senior citizens who were isolated during the pandemic.

A legitimate use of ARPA funds.