

**Windham ARPA Advisors Committee
Meeting Minutes ~ January 12, 2023**

Via Zoom

Bill Dunkel	Michael Simonds
Cathy Edgerly Fales	Tom Widger
David Lewis	Jan Wyman
Mary McCoy (Mac)	

1. Call to Order

Mac called the meeting to order at 5:33 PM and started the Zoom recording.

2. Minute Approval

There were no changes to the minutes of November 16, 2022. Michael moved to approve the minutes, and Cathy seconded. The minutes were approved by everyone.

3. Changes to the Agenda

Mac commented that we don't have the figures we need to make final decisions. She asked if the committee members were okay with doing what they could to come up with a tentative breakdown of how the funds might be divided. There was agreement to do so.

4. Public Comments

There was no one present from the public.

5. Check-in – Review of APRA Objectives. Mac read this summary of the objectives.

- Address the negative impact of Covid on our town's families and businesses
- Maintain and enhance town government's services despite loss of income or increase in costs caused by Covid
- Promote the town's public health and human services, including support for first responders
- Invest in our town's long-term growth with improvements to infrastructure, including broadband expansion and efforts to address climate change

The committee members expressed their understanding of these objectives. They agreed that the proposed projects fit these guidelines.

6. Update on Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP)

Cathy shared information she has gathered. The state is now qualifying the vendors who will do the actual energy-related work. By early March the applications should be available for up to \$4,000 for outreach and education about the program as well as for energy audits conducted on town buildings. We would have help from the Windham Regional Commission (WRC) to file this application. The audits have to be done by the end of 2023. Once that process is complete, we can apply for up to \$500,000 for the actual energy work. Mike McConnell at the WRC will be our contact there. MERP will fund weatherization, upgrades to heating systems, and anything related to energy. Solar arrays were not specifically mentioned. We have been told by Katie Buckley at the VLCT that the panels can be a part of ARPA. Cathy will find out if they can be funded by MERP. She also mentioned that non-governmental groups, like the Fire Company, can

apply for MERP funds. However, schools cannot.

Bill asked who makes the decisions. Cathy said perhaps the regional commissions in conjunction with the state Department of Buildings and General Services. Cathy said she has communicated with Laura Sebilia who authored the legislation that established MERP, and Laura is interested in what we're doing and supportive. Cathy said the info about MERP stresses collaboration. She does not know when we'll be able to apply for the larger amount, but she thinks we should apply for our first grant for \$4000 as soon as possible after the applications are available. We already have had some energy audits done, but we don't know if any of those might save some time. Bill asked Cathy to find out who makes the final decisions and if the WRC has a say in the matter. He said the Energy Committee has not discussed this, but he will put it on the agenda for their next meeting. In terms of applying, several on the committee indicated they would help, but no clear commitments were made. Mike McConnell said the goal is to make it as easy as possible to apply. Bill wondered if a regional commissioner (him) can be involved in the process. Cathy will find out.

7. Discussion on possible division of the ARPA funds, considering (1) requested amount, (2) smallest possible amount, and (3) largest possible amount.

Mac presented a spreadsheet (attached, as updated after the meeting). The projects were listed and discussed in order of their support from the Monkey Survey.

- Firefighters Gear – Jan presented a total amount needed: \$10,894. She said she was unable to get three bids, as there is only one vendor in Vermont. Mac asked if anyone thought the amount should be higher or lower. Bill asked about all requested projects: Is there another source of income for this? In the town report last year, the Fire Company showed a surplus of \$142,000. Jan explained that the surplus is for new equipment. A fire truck costs about \$300,00. The Fire Company also needs a new building. They are putting aside money to be prepared for the future. Mac said the selectboard might decrease what they give the Fire Company if they get ARPA funds. Jan said the ARPA money is for funds lost due to Covid, and there was a year that the Fire Company didn't have their fund-raisers. Jan will find out how much income they lost as a result of Covid. Bill said before we fund this project, we should decide what we give the others. Jan said she totally agreed.
- Meeting House – Tom reported the estimate for the generator is \$14,600. He thinks this is important in order to keep the heating system going when the grid goes down. The estimate for the insulation is around \$27,175. He is getting estimates for putting sheetrock in the storage area under the stairs for fire prevention purposes. He thinks this might be \$8000 or \$9000. We also know that to meet fire code, we need a commercial-grade exhaust system over the stove, and it will cost around \$6000. Meeting fire codes would allow weddings and other events to take place there. The Meeting House exterior needs to be painted, and the Friends of the Meeting House are looking at that. Tom talked to Kathy Scott about adding \$5,000 to the Meeting House fund again this year.

Mac suggested that we might hold off on the heating and apply for that through MERP. Bill said we're heating a lot of hot water that isn't being used. We need to look into a short-term fix for that, and not wait for MERP. Tom agreed. A couple of thousand dollars might fix that.

Bill said the heating system situation must also be addressed as soon as possible. He said the Meeting House is a like a fireplace, as there is a draft that pulls the hot air up through the building and out of the uninsulated attic roof. He thinks we should address that with insulation, and we need to get the estimates as soon as possible for a new heating system. He thinks we should not wait on the MERP money. At \$4 a gallon for heating fuel, it is too expensive. This is a high priority.

Michael agreed that we need to insulate the building as well as change the heating system. He asked how the generator would be powered, and Tom said by propane. It would be used to keep the heating system running and provide 75% of the electricity needed. The generator would kick on only when we lose power.

Bill said we're up to \$60,000 already for the Meeting House without the heating system. That's more than half of the ARPA funds. We need to figure out what the bottom-line request is for the Meeting House. We can't allocate the ARPA funds until we know what the Meeting House needs will be. We need to get someone to assess the building based on its running by electricity.

Cathy said there are many grants for historic buildings. We need to explore all the possibilities for what is out there to determine what other funds are available. Tom agreed. There is some seed money – \$5,000 – but that's not enough to do anything. We need more to get matching grants.

With no conclusions on this and meeting time limited, the committee moved on to the other projects.

- Broadband Fund – **Motion:** To ask the selectboard to approve \$14,600 for DVFiber to provide funding for individuals in Windham who need financial assistance to connect to DVFiber. Tom moved, and several people seconded it. Mac asked if anyone thought it should be a smaller or larger amount, and no one did. Everyone was in favor of the motion.
- Solar Array – Michael said this is a priority as when power is lost from the grid, we can use solar power. Also, this pays for itself, as the town spends \$9,000 a year for electricity. If we produce any excess power, we can sell it to GMP. This is a wonderful opportunity for us, and it reduces the fossil fuel the town uses.

Cathy asked if we have looked into the Innovative Clean Energy Loans, used by municipalities and universities to borrow funds for solar arrays and pay the loans back with the savings from their electric bills. The award amount is unlimited and it is noncompetitive. This would be a good option. Cathy will send us the info about it.

Tom suggested we consider the high of \$27,300 and the low of \$20,000, and the others accepted this.

- Grant Writer – Cathy's research shows that a successful grant writer charges \$55 to \$150 per hour, with an average of around \$70. We could consider having 100 hours at \$70. Some of the grants include the cost of a grant writer. It would be good to have someone ready to do grants for us. We also need to decide who will oversee this. Mac said the selectboard recognizes that a grant writer needed, as well as someone who can administer the grants. Their time would depend on how much work was involved – some grants are simple and others are very complex. Michael asked if grant writers work on a commission. Cathy said some do, but for our purposes we shouldn't count of that. We would benefit by having a

successful grant writer and not look for volunteers. This is a way to make the ARPA money make more money.

Mac suggested that \$7000 be considered as the low, and \$21,000 as the high, thinking that larger amount might be enough to fund this work for three years. There was no other discussion. Mac put the average of \$14,000 as the estimated amount needed.

- Town Office Improvements – Ellen was not present to give us any estimated cost amounts. Mac said the cost of the ventilation system was in excess of the amount budgeted, and the selectboard wants to pay for the excess with ARPA funds. The exact amount is not yet known. It could be as much as \$5000 and as little as \$2000, so she put in \$3500 as the estimated amount needed.

Mac explained that the land records have been digitized, but a digital index is needed. The selectboard has already designated \$1200 for this. Mac put in a guess for \$4000 for the total. A color copier might be \$500, a survey copier could be \$1000, a researcher's station could be \$2,000. That brought the possible total to \$10,000.

- Audio-visual Equipment – At one point, Mac was told the selectboard wanted \$10,000 for this, so she used that as the estimated. Tom suggested that the Owl could be used for multiple purposes, and \$5,000 was probably plenty.
- Beautify Windham – Kermit was not present to discuss his idea. Tom thinks this project is unnecessary. He'd like to take it off the table. **Motion:** To spend no ARPA funds for plantings. Tom moved, and Bill seconded it. Discussion – Cathy said Kermit is not here, so it is not a good time to take this off our list. She is not in favor of the motion as a result. Tom amended his motion to set it at \$500. Bill said we have three buildings. The town office is nice with Dawn's flower plantings. The Meeting House has a new lovely memorial in front, and the garage can't be beautified. We are already over our \$118,380, and Kermit presented no specific idea. It's a low priority. Jan and David agreed. **Motion:** To have an estimated amount of \$500 for the plantings. The motion passed with Tom casting a negative vote, and Bill abstaining.

Mac reviewed the decisions so far. We're about \$26,000 over. Only the Fire Company and DVFiber have a firm request. Mac will talk to the selectboard to get some idea as to how they want to handle the Meeting House expenses. Should we wait for MERP for the Meeting House and the solar array? Bill asked Mac to talk with the selectboard about a new heating system for the Meeting House. Until that's fixed, even if we insulate and fix the hot water situation, we will continue to lose money on heating. David said we might not need to do the full insulation job, and he suggested separating the cost for the insulation in the crawlspace and the one for the sanctuary floor. Bill didn't know if it made sense to do one without the other. Michael asked if the Friends of the Meeting House have money. Mac said they have over \$100,000, but they want to paint the exterior of the building, and the estimate on that is \$80,000.

Cathy said we've come back to the issue of whether we have the full picture of the resources available from all possible sources. We should be even-handed, treating all projects the same in terms of what other funds are available. Cathy volunteered to talk with Katie Buckley to see what she thinks of our proposed projects and the funding available for them, so we know

what we can apply for now. She'll find out if MERP will fund the solar panels, if we might apply for the Innovative Clean Energy Loans, if Bill can work on the MERP grant since he's on the WRC, and who makes the final decisions on MERP funding.

8. Decisions – No additional decisions can be made, as more estimates are needed. Key will be deciding whether to hold off on some items and apply to fund them through MERP or other sources. The selectboard needs to give us some guidance on that. Tom said the spreadsheet was helpful, and others agreed. That reminded Mac that Kord mentioned using some ARPA funds to pay her wage as clerk and chair of the ARPA Committee. Mac asked if anyone objects to this. She suggested \$2000 as a high and \$1000 as a low. Others agreed to funding this at those estimated amounts.

9. Schedule Next Meeting – Tom suggested meeting in three weeks, then changed it to four weeks for February 9th. All agreed to that. Bill suggested we find out some amounts prior to that, such as for the water heater. Mac asked if anyone would get an estimate for on-demand electric water heaters. David volunteered to do that. David asked about the separate quotes on the Meeting House insulation for the crawlspace and the sanctuary floor. Mac said she would put that on the spreadsheet. The next meeting is:

Thursday, February 9, 2023 at 5:30 PM.

10. Adjournment – Michael moved to adjourn the meeting, and we all agreed. The meeting was adjourned at 7:02 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary McCoy (Mac), Selectboard clerk
and ARPA Committee clerk
Minutes approved 2-9-2023