**Windham ARPA Advisors Committee**

**Meeting Minutes ~ November 16, 2022**

**Via Zoom**

David Cherry, guest

Kermit Blackburn

Bill Dunkel

Cathy Fales

David Lewis

Mary McCoy (Mac), clerk

Ellen McDuffie

Michael Simonds

Tom Widger

Jan Wyman

**1. Call to Order**

Mac called the meeting to order at 5:41 PM, with a late start due to a technical problem.

**2. Minute Approval**

There were no changes to the minutes of October 12, 2002. Michael moved to approve the minutes, and Cathy seconded. The minutes were approved by everyone.

**3. Changes to the Agenda**

There were no changes to the agenda.

**4.Public Comments**

David Cherry was the only non-committee member present, and he reserved his comments for the update on the broadband project.

**5. Check in – What is the best way to use the survey results?**

Opinions varied somewhat about how to use the survey results. Some wanted to be sure all projects got some funding, as all received some support on the survey, and others wanted to fund the projects that received the highest survey ratings, and not those with lower ratings. Everyone agreed that the need for actual financial estimates is essential, and that we don’t have to be wedded to the survey, as we only asked for opinions. We will use survey as a guide, weighed with the cost estimates. We should also factor in donations or additional funding from other grants. Cathy said her research shows there are significant grants available. Tom committed that there are matching grants available for the Meeting House.

**6. Review survey results and discuss**

Cathy walked us through the survey results. We had 74 responses, 69 fulltime residents and 5 parttime residents, and there were no noticeable differences in their responses. We asked two main questions, and there were similarities in the results of those two. Both showed that the firefighters had the largest numbers, and the plantings had the smallest. The broadband project and the Meeting House renovations shared the next highest numbers, and the rest were very similar in support.

The comments were worth noting, especially some suggesting that the School would make a better emergency shelter than the Meeting House. Cathy added that parking at the Town Office and School would be better than parking at the Meeting House. Mac reminded the committee that we were told by our contact at the VLCT and by our local FEMA heads that using ARPA funds for the School is not appropriate because the town does not own the School building (the school district does).

Bill said that the issue of the Meeting House can be looked at two ways – one is its needs for repairs and renovation, and the other is the work to make it an emergency shelter. The second option has requirements that the Meeting House may or may not meet. The repair and renovations needs are many. For example, the heating of hot water is a big issue, as it should not be running full-time. Michael said he supports making the Meeting House more efficient and distancing it from being an emergency shelter. Others agreed that we need to focus on making the Meeting House more functional.

Cathy mentioned a grant for the Meeting House that includes the expense of a grant writer. It requires a 1-1 match of $5,000 to $10,000. Tom said the Meeting House has already raised that amount of money, and he said the Meeting House Committees are working on getting financial estimates. We don’t need exact costs now, only the estimates on costs.

Mac commented that if a project requires prices for multiple items or services, estimates need to provided on each expense, and the full list of items and services should be prioritized for the ARPA Committee. Ellen, Tom, and others commented on how difficult it is to get cost estimates.

**7. Discuss and decide how to share survey results**

It was agreed that we should share the results with the public in an email blast, on the town website, and in the News and Notes. Cathy will put together an email, that includes a pie chart. We need to be careful to clarify that the survey results were based on opinions, and final determination can’t be made until we get cost estimates.

**8. Discuss committee’s ongoing work**

According to our committee’s job description, once we make our recommendation to the selectboard, our job is done. But the selectboard sees that we have advocates on our committee or elsewhere for each of the eight projects, and the selectboard would like us to see things through, including getting estimates and the actual bids. The town policy says that any expense over $1,000 requires estimates from two or three vendors. If the cost is over $5,000, there is a required bidding process with sealed bids that are opened at a public meeting. The question was asked, if we give money to the Fire Company, and they are their own entity, do they have to meet the town’s requirement for estimates. Mac will get the answer to this.

Mac asked each committee member if they would see things through. All agreed, except Bill, who said his help would be limited, due to his other commitments. He and the Energy Committee will help as they can with issues related to energy. David Cherry said DVFiber has a business plan, and he will follow through for what is needed in Windham.

**9. Updates on the projects of interest**

David Cherry reported at length about the DVFiber need from ARPA and the Town. There are $5 million dollars available as matching funds to all the towns involved with DVFiber, with half of that amount remaining. For a town to get some of the remaining $2.5 million, it has to provide matching funds, and ARPA funds have been used for that bt other towns.

One thing to use the money for is to get the wiring to every internet user, regardless of how far your home is from a utility pole. Installation is at no cost if you live within 400 feet of a pole. If your home is further than that and you are income challenged (qualifying for an ACP grant), the ARPA funds can be used to connect you. The funds could also help you if you live in a trailer, as the wiring must be underground. The match is dollar for dollar. In Windham, 50% of homes have speeds below 25 bps. Based on utility pole info and government figures, Windham is estimated to need $29,000 to help people who can’t afford hook-ups, and we’d need half of that from ARPA funds.

David offered some words of caution, saying we won’t be online in Windham for a couple of years, so if we pledge ARPA funds, and send the letter saying so, we should also specify exactly what we want the money to be used for. Otherwise, DVFiber can use the funds any way they want. DVFiber depends on grant funds, mostly from government sources. David has sent all of the committee members the report explaining all of this. Cathy asked if second-home owners would be able to access the funds, and David said if you own a second home, you probably don’t qualify as someone who is income challenged. David also encouraged the town to make a decision as promptly as possible, as the matching money will not last indefinitely.

**10. Next Meeting**

In order to give everyone time to get estimates together over the holiday season, Mac suggested that we not meet in December. Michael noted that selectboard needs to write a letter regarding DVFiber as soon as possible. David said the committee could recommend this now to get the match, and he asked that we move on this recommendation. Bill asked if we could wait until January to make a recommendation, and skim this amount off the top, to ensure we get the match. David said he thought that January would be find.

Jan moved that we meet in January, and Ellen seconded it. All agreed. It was also agreed that we would vote on the funds for DVFiber at that meeting. The meeting was set for

**Thursday, January 12, 2023 at 5:30 PM**.

**11. Adjournment**

Michael moved to adjourn the meeting, Ellen seconded it, and we all agreed. The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary McCoy (Mac)

ARPA Committee clerk

*Minutes approved January 12, 2023*