

**Windham ARPA Advisors Committee
Meeting Minutes
February 9, 2023**

Via Zoom

Bill Dunkel	Michael Simonds
Cathy Edgerly Fales	Tom Widger
Mary McCoy (Mac)	Jan Wyman
Mike McConnell, guest	Pete Newton, guest

1. Call to Order

Mac called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM and started the Zoom recording.

2. Minute Approval

There were no changes to the minutes of January 12, 2023. Michael moved to approve the minutes, and Cathy seconded. The minutes were approved by those present.

3. Changes to the Agenda

There were no changes to the agenda. Mac commented that there might be some fluidity between the items on the agenda as they overlap each other.

4. Public Comments

There were no public comments

5. Review of spreadsheet to add any new known estimated costs

Mac asked if there were any new estimates to add. No one had any. Mac said that Ellen told her the cost of the new copier would be \$5,500. This replaces the current copier which is 10 years old, or older, and does not make color copies. We still don't know how much the digital index will be, but Ellen estimated the work station for researchers would be \$1000. In terms of the AV equipment, we have what we need if we're on Zoom only. But we'll need more when we go back to hybrid or in-person only. Selectboard members have agreed to research the costs for what is needed. Michael is getting an estimate from Integrated Solar in April to provide another estimate on the solar panels for the Town Office.

Bill said he talked to Pete Newton about the Meeting House (MH). He can give estimates regarding the outside entrance, the doors, and the other fire code related issues, as he has had a fire inspection done recently. He has specific ideas for remaking the outside entrance and doors. Bill also mentioned that the MH currently meets most ADA standards, which is important to apply for the MERP grant. Tom said he spoke with Tom Johnson and Pete from the Friends of the MH, and they have a quote for painting the outside of the building, about \$82,000. Grant money is needed to get that done. The paint job is essential. Tom said Pete and Tom Johnson met with a fire marshal.

Pete joined this ARPA meeting and said it is OK to bake or heat using the oven or to cook on stove top if what is being cooked produces no vapors.

6. Provide information on other funding sources

A) Report on regional meeting in Wilmington – Mac said she, Michael, Bill, and Cathy attended the meeting. Cathy reported that this “road show” with heads from various state agencies was put

together to address the needs of smaller towns with no paid staff to pursue grants. The governor wants rural towns to get more of the money sent to Vermont by the federal government. The state representatives there talked about possibilities for funding besides ARPA. Cathy said we need take a long view, get together the info we will need, manage the deadlines, and consider the best way to maximize our ARPA funds. This requires multi-tracks at the same time, also called “grant stacking,” which the experts recommended. It requires coordination, consistency, and communication, and people who are willing to do the work. Bill added that one valuable things about the meeting was speaking one-on-one with valuable people who can help us.

B) Support from the Windham Regional Commission (WRC) – Mac introduced Mike McConnell from WRC who is helping towns apply for the Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP). Mike said MERP begins with an energy audit. There is an “audit light” which is a simple walk-around energy evaluation. There is also a more intense energy audit which is needed for more extensive MERP funding, and he would recommend this. It is free and provided by the state. There are three elements of MERP: (1) the energy audit that he can help us set up, (2) the grant program for up to \$500,000 for items that come up in the assessment, and (3) the revolving loan program. There is also a \$4000 mini-grant for a consultant to help provide education and community engagement. He recommends that we pursue this useful tool.

Mike said it is important that the town own the MP, which we do. He offered to send us a text version of the bill (Act 172) that created MERP. It spells out the aspects of the assessment, including a list of what needs to be done and cost estimates. Mike read from the bill, and it says that the energy assessment includes scope or work, costs, and timeline for completion. Insulation is covered by MERP. The key priority is tightening the thermal envelop (insulation, doorways, windows) and that ranks before replacing oil heaters. Mike said they are leaning toward advanced wood as the replacement. Bill noted that we are interested in heat pumps. Mike commented that there are many things that have not been decided about what will be funded.

Bill said Jennifer Fitch (from the state department that is administering MERP) said we need to gather information in advance. Mike said the list of what is needed is not complete, but the info he has from WRC lists the following: location, type of building, department of town that controls the building, when it was built, when it was upgraded and how, number of floors, square footage, type of heating system, type of cooling system, and five-years of energy costs for heating and electric. The list will evolve, but he thinks these are what will be needed.

Pete said the MERP audit will provide answers to many questions about what will work. He said the upstairs is a barn without any insulation. It would require a special assessment, as there is no way to make entire building tight. We will want to heat the first floor only. Mike said that is something that needs to be considered. Pete also asked if we’d be required to meet all ADA accessibility, as we have a few issues to deal with. ADA compliance is required, but not until all the work is completed. Also, high speed internet is required.

Cathy asked Mike about grant stacking – if we apply for MERP, can we also apply for other grants? There are so many pots of money, how do we integrate them? Mike said stacking allows ARPA money to be used as matching funds or to cover part of the cost. We can use it to leverage other monies. MERP money does not require a match.

Mike explained the revolving loan grant, saying it part of the program that is the least flushed out. It can be used for many of the same things. It is another pool of funds. If the audit identifies projects totaling more than \$500,000, it is unclear who decides what MERP will fund.

Pete mentioned the Paul Bruhn Grant, which is part of Preservation Trust of Vermont, which Mike knew nothing about. Pete has submitted an initial eligibility application to them. It offers help with structural repair, new roof, insulation, heating system, and accessibility. Pete’s focus was on rebuilding the front doors and the entrance area. He is ready with a report from fire

marshal and an accessibility assessment. He has contacted them to see if we can use a plan that he creates or if an architect is required. Cathy said she spoke with them, and they offer \$500 matching for architects at reduced fees. Pete said they got that \$500 last year which identified where we are not in compliance, but he didn't like the architect's plan for the building. Pete said the Bruhn Grant proposal is due at the end of March. They want a proposal ready for the selectboard to support by the beginning of March.

Bill asked Mike how we'll know when we can apply for the audit, and Mike said he or Margo will email or call to let us know. We can do it on our own or with his assistance. Cathy asked about the \$4000 grant. That item was switched in the order of the agenda, so Mike could answer questions before he left the meeting.

8) Consider \$4,000 MERP grant – Cathy said this would be a good way to get started, and Mike read the grant's purpose as stated in the bill: to facilitate meetings and provide information about energy resilience.

7) Consider Gathering of the Minds for the Meeting House – Mac said all that is possible for the MH provides a huge opportunity, and it is a way to get town folks together, perhaps even healing some of the past divides, as everyone in town cares about the Meeting House. She presented the idea of a meeting with folks from other committees with a direct concern about the Meeting House – the selectboard, the Friends of the Meeting House, the town's Meeting House Committee, the Energy Committee, the Planning Commission, the WCO, and the Library.

Mac mentioned Meg Staloff, who helped the folks from Wardsboro to make a plan, might to the same for us. Cathy clarified that Meg's work is to provide a plan for the town, not just for one building. We could use the \$4000 for a town-wide meeting on the Meeting House. We can apply for the \$4000 and at the same time apply for the energy assessment. Cathy said the application for the \$4000 will be available by March 7, and we want to be ready to apply.

Mac suggested in April have an expanded ARPA meeting with representatives from other groups in order to get other key players on board. We can also apply for the \$4000 grant to have something for the whole town, and at the same time put in a proposal for the energy audit. Pete said having a meeting about the MH is a great idea.

Pete asked Mike if there are any grants that will cover painting the building. The Bruhn Grant is for \$50,000 to \$100,000. Pete said they plan to use some of the \$100,000 in the Friends' treasury as leverage for partial and matching funds for painting, safety and accessibility issues. Most of the \$100,000 came from the congregation to maintain the building, and they don't want to blow it all on the painting. The Friends have been around since the 70s. Their job was keeping up the outside.

Mac said it would be great to have a list of the grants we might pursue. Cathy said she could create that. She mentioned that if the MH had more artistic or performance use, we could apply to the Vermont Arts Council. Pete said he has been told from the Preservation Trust and Division of Historic Preservation that the Meeting House would be a fit for funds for a performance space. There are other funds that would enhance the MH to make it more comfortable and usable for community events.

Jan asked about possible funds for the Fire Company, which is a nonprofit. Mike didn't know any, as it is not in his area.

Motion: To have an expanded ARPA meeting in April that is focused on the Meeting House with representatives from the town groups Mac mentioned earlier. Mac moved and Michael seconded. The motion passed as everyone agreed.

Cathy suggested a subcommittee or another meeting to plan it. Mac suggested a meeting in March of the ARPA committee to plan the April meeting. It was agreed to have the planning

meeting on Wednesday, March 15 at 5:30 PM on Zoom, and ARPA Plus meeting on April 1 at 10:00 AM at the Meeting House.

Mac acknowledged the extraordinary amount of work Cathy has done to make contacts and research possibilities. Cathy said we have a slew of people who are ready to help us, legislators and others, and we can put together a strong showing.

Bill asked who will collect data needed for the energy audit so it is ready in early March. Pete suggested that we get five-year accounting of electricity and energy from the energy providers. Bill has some data on the energy usage, amount and cost. He will talk with Energy Committee to come up with the five-year costs. Michael suggested getting help from Kathy Scott, town treasurer. Pete can provide information about the renovations. The report the architect did is pretty thorough, as well as some other recent assessments on the building. Cathy will create the list Mike gave us of the info we need to have ready, and she will share it with others. She will also create the list of other monies available to present at the April meeting. Pete mentioned the great history of the building and the need to preserve it. `

The next ARPA Meeting is Wednesday March 15, 2023 at 5:30 PM.

10. Adjournment – Michael moved to adjourn the meeting, and we all agreed. The meeting was adjourned at 6:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary McCoy (Mac), selectboard clerk
and ARPA Committee clerk/chair
Approved 3-16-2023