

Meeting Minutes
Windham ARPA Advisors Committee
By Zoom Only
Tuesday, July 10, 2023

Those Present

Bill Dunkel	Tom Widger
Cathy Edgerly Fales	Mary McCoy (Mac), clerk
Michael Simonds	Pete Newton, guest

Note: Because we didn't have a quorum, no motions could be passed. Five of the nine committee members are required for a quorum, and four were present. The clerk does not have a vote. Members were absent due to a tremendous rain that caused flooding.

- 1. Call meeting to order** – Mac called the meeting to order at 5:35 PM.
- 2. Act on the minutes of the past meeting of June 20, 2023** – No action could be taken
- 3. Make changes (if any) to the agenda** – There were no changes to the agenda.
- 4. Hear public comments on items not on the agenda** – There were no public comments.
- 5. Update on the Meeting House**

Update on townwide meeting on the Meeting House – Cathy said she and Mac have started to make plans. The date of August 12 for the meeting was set based on Meg Staloff's availability. She is the one who will facilitate the meeting. Cathy and Mac have worked on a flyer for the event, and they plan to have it ready for distribution at the WCO's BBQ on this coming Saturday. We will also send out the flyer in a mailing to everyone, telling them they can offer their ideas for the future of the MH, hear about the plans for improvements, learn how they might help, tour the building, see their neighbors and friends, and enjoy some food.

The only cost would be for the mailing, as we would look for donated food. Cathy will donate the printing of the flyers and the envelopes for mailing. We'll see if we can do the mailing using the WCO bulk permit. Whatever the cost for mailing, we can take it from the ARPA funds for the MH. We'll also ask Ellen to do an email blast. At the event, we can have Pete, Tom, Bill and others speak on specific topics. In Wardsboro, they had 60 people there, but perhaps that was because they served alcohol.

The purpose of the townwide meeting is to build consensus in town and have a report to add to grant proposals, showing community support for improvements to the Meeting House. It is also a good way to get people together. Tom pointed out that the Fire Company's BBQ is August 12. Our event would have to start at 9:00 or we should pick another day. We need to ask Meg about other times she is available. Pete is gone July 11-20. Mac and Michael are gone July 20-21. Cathy said we have a proposal due on October 1, so we need to have our report by then. We need to decide on a date to have a flyer ready for the WCO BBQ.

Mac said we hope to have other town committees as co-hosts. Bill said he the Planning Commission and the Energy Committee can be listed as hosts. Tom said we could list the Town MH Committee, and Pete said we could list the Friends of the MH. Mac will contact the WCO about co-hosting and using their bulk permit.

Meeting House funding options – Bill asked about the MERP proposal for the audit. Cathy will prepare it. She asked Tom and Bill about the power usage, and Tom said he has all of utility bills. Bill will work with Cathy on the proposal.

Update on insulation for the Meeting House – Pete said it makes sense to wait for the MERP audit before any decision is made about the insulation. He has ideas on what is best, but it is unclear how to best install the insulation. We need to decide what we'll insulate and how to do it. Cathy said that after the audit, we will need to get drawings done, and then apply for the bigger MERP grant (of up to \$500,000). Although the audit is required for the bigger grant, there is no guarantee that we'll get it. The state has ranked towns in terms of their need, and we are in the middle of the pack. Cathy said that the folks at the WRC encouraged us to apply. Mac wondered if the Energy Committee would take charge of this, as it is not a matter for the APRA Committee.

Cathy raised the possibility of being able to use the sanctuary in the winter. Pete said it is very difficult to maintain cellulose insulation over the years. It gets moisture in it and causes damage. The previous experts who did the assessment said the sanctuary should never be insulated. If it needs to be heated, turn the heat up for that day. Another option is to put a large crowd into the room downstairs.

Bill said we're getting ahead of ourselves. Let's focus on getting the audit. We can't get any state money unless we do the audit. He and Cathy will do the application for that. Tom said he agreed with Peter that we should not insulate the upstairs and with Bill that we need to get the audit done. Once the audit is done, we can move forward.

Pete said the Friends are focused on the outside, but also care about the whole building. It seems like some of the grants we know about aren't interested in helping with the exterior painting and the entrance areas. If we don't get grants, we can work on that with other funds, including the ARPA funds. Mac said that Kathy Scott told her that the Friends are responsible for the outside and any exterior work has to be done by the Friends, not the town. Pete said he would talk to Kathy about that. He is not aware of any such determination.

Cathy talked to the selectboard chair in Wardsboro. They did a plan like ours and applied for and received a Better Places grant. It requires matching funds. Cathy is also looking at the 1776 grant. It offers some for exterior painting, but only up to \$10,000. If we had a good program for increased use of the MH, we might get funds from the Arts Council for up to \$60,000. The ARPA committee has said we want to use our funds as matching money and to make it go as far as possible.

Tom said he wants the ARPA Committee to give the MH Committee a block grant of \$40,000 - \$50,000 to use as they determine, based on approval by the selectboard. The ARPA funds have to be used by 2026, and that will come quickly, especially because contractors are booked far ahead.

6. Update on Solar Array

Michael addressed Tom's question about making the solar array smaller. Tom thinks it will produce more energy than we need and suggested downgrading it. Michael said the array would produce more than is currently being used, but we will be increasing our electrical use. We already have increased bills from the air exchange system in the Town Office. We won't lose any credits for producing more electricity than we use, and making the array smaller won't meet future needs.

Tom wants the selectboard to approve X amount of dollars for the MH. Mac said a silent

bidding process must be conducted for anything costing more than \$5,000. Tom said he can get three bids for the generator and the exhaust over the stove. He wants to get started on that as soon as possible.

Bill suggested that we take a chunk of the ARPA money and set it aside, saying it will be used at the appropriate time for the MH and the array. Then we apply for the MERP money and other grants. If we get them for the MH, we have the money saved to use for the array. If not, we use it all for the MH. If we get grants, then we put in the array. If no grants, we won't need the solar array. We need to set priorities. We need a plan of action. We seem to be moving in various directions. Let's not fund anything in particular until we know what we can get from grants. Tom agreed, so did Cathy.

Michael said the solar array makes money for us and reduces taxes. Making it smaller will cost three-fourths of what it will cost to do the whole thing. Bill said he is in favor of the solar array, but right now, the MH is running on dirty energy and much is wasted due to lack of insulation. For a win-win, we need to fix the MH energy waste *and* get the solar array. The question is the proper timing. Tom agreed and said let's find out what people want at the townwide meeting.

Michael said the ARPA committee has met for 15 months. We have everything in place to move forward on the solar array. If we wait, we lose what we could gain financially by having it. He supports the MH improvements, but he thinks we should produce power now.

Cathy said it is an issue of cash flow. She asked when we would get the 30% return from the Tax Incentive Credit? Michael said he thought it would be a matter of months.

Bill said one of our difficulties is that we don't know what things are going to cost for the MH. We don't know how much grant money we need to get. Perhaps the MERP process will help. As a committee, we need to determine what the smartest way is to move forward.

7. Review spreadsheet re possible distribution of ARPA funds

Mac shared the spreadsheet. The possible cost of the array might be \$46,000, and we'll get 30% back. Tom questioned if that was certain. Mac said the 30% is a given. Tom asked where the money would come from to pay the vendor before we get the 30% back. Michael said the money would come from the ARPA funds. We would pay for the 30% and get it back later. Bill asked how much is left now in the ARPA funds. Mac said \$84,308. If we funded the array now, there would be \$38,308 left, and we would have \$45,686 after we get the 30% back.

8. Schedule next meeting – Mac wondered if we need to focus on hiring a grant writer. Cathy said we need a plan that would determine how to proceed, and it is too soon for a grant writer, as she and Bill will do the MERP grant. She would like to have a strategic plan, then move forward based on that. We could put a plan together and have Meg or Katie Buckley review it. Most of the grants we want require matching funds. We know what grants there are. If we know our priorities, we can determine a plan. There is even money for that.

Mac asked how much of the work for a plan was done already with the plan Meg and the MH steering committee did. Cathy said there are no clear priorities with that, which we need. Mac suggesting having someone make a plan and then having the ARPA group tweak it, but we need to get more input on energy uses, what the town folks want, what grants are available. Cathy has list of grants available, but who decides the priorities? Us? The selectboard? We need to make sure our funds get used wisely.

Bill said it wouldn't be hard to look at a list of what is needed for the MH and rank them in need of priority, run it by us and the MH Committee and Friends and the Energy

Committee, and maybe there would be more consensus than we know. He thinks the top need is the insulation. ADA compliance is also important, as is the solar array. But when do we put up the solar array? If we knew we could get grant money, he would say do the array first. But we don't know that. We need to prepare for not getting any grants. Who can give us an idea of whether or not we will get grants? Pete said getting the Bruhn grant was never certain, and it turned out to be a long-shot, due to there being a lot of applicants.

Cathy said she could share what others have told us about our chances. An Arts Council grants would be a great way to get the entrance compliant to ADA and fire codes. She talked to the director for the Arts Council, and they need to know that we have a lot of programming there, like once a month, and that we have connections with other towns to bring people in. We could get state preservation grant. They don't want anything historic changed. We have to have a strategy for various applications. We have to meet their specifications. We could get more funding for our library *if* it were used more. Pete said we have a long record of what the MH has been used for in the past. Cathy said the usage of the building wouldn't matter for the preservation grants, but it does for the Arts Council. We are competing with towns that are using their meeting houses for many activities. We need a strategy and commitment.

Mac said let's take the info we have from the report Meg has already prepared, get info from townwide meeting, and make a plan after that. For today, let's adjourn and move forward at the next meeting.

- 9. Schedule next meeting** – Before we set another meeting, we needed to set a date for the townwide meeting. Cathy will talk to Meg about dates. Perhaps Sept 23rd. Bill suggested not on the same day as the Fire Company BBQ. How about August 5th? Perhaps not on a Saturday. Perhaps in September? We need to have the strategic plan by October 1 for the state preservation proposal. Cathy will talk to Meg and ask her what she thinks is the optimal time. Mac said people are turning out in-person better on the weekends than during the week.

We scheduled the next ARPA meeting for 5:30 on Tuesday, July 18.

- 10. Adjourn meeting and stop recording** –The meeting was adjourned at 7:14 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary McCoy (Mac), ARPA Clerk
Approved 8-2-2023