**Meeting Minutes**

**Windham ARPA Advisors Committee**

**By Zoom Only**

**Wednesday, August 30, 2023**

**Present Committee Members and Guest**

Kermit Blackwood

Bill Dunkel

George Dutton

Cathy Edgerly Fales

Ellen McDuffie

Michel Simonds

Tom Widger

Jan Wyman (came late)

Mary McCoy (Mac), clerk

Joyce Cumming, guest

**1. Call meeting to order –** Mac called the meeting to order at 5:31 PM.

**2. Act on the minutes of the past two meetings**

 **Motion:** To approve the minutes from the ARPA meeting held August 2, 2023. Michael moved, Cathy seconded, and all agreed

**3. Make changes (if any) to the agenda** – Mac asked to change the agenda to discuss the final distribution of the ARPA funds as item 5, instead of item 7. There was no disagreement.

**4. Hear public comments on items not on the agenda** – There were none.

**5. Discuss final distribution of the ARPA funds** –

* Comments on ARPA Committee’s role – Referring to the committee’s role as approved by the selectboard, Mac noted that the group had or would soon fulfill its purpose and duties. Its purpose is to determine the use of $118,380 and to make recommendations to the selectboard. Our duties have been or soon will be fulfilled. We have worked with other town committees; talked to folks in other towns; provided public education about our work through our articles in the News & Notes and our Survey Monkey; explored (and are still exploring) opportunities to leverage our ARPA funds through additional grants; and we’ve made recommendations to the selectboard. Mac said we’ve done a good job. We’ve done what we were asked to do.
* Review of financial spreadsheet – Mac shared the spreadsheet for all to see, looking at our targeted projects.
* Jan reported on the Fire Company gear. Thy have ordered and received the safety masks, and Jon (Fire Co. chief) is in the process of ordering the other gear. She thanked the APRA committee for approving $10,984 for fire gear.
* Mac said that at the last selectboard meeting, they approved our recommendation of $8000 for the pursuit of grants for the Meeting House – $4000 for the grant strategist (Cathy) and $4000 for a grant writer. She noted that that second $4000 may not be entirely needed.
* Our recommendation of $14,600 was approved to help ensure that folks can get connected to high-speed internet from DVFiber.
* At the last selectboard meeting, they approved sending out a request for bids for the solar array on the Town Office roof, and those bids will be opened at the selectboard’s

September 5th meeting. George is talking to a roofer to make sure the roof can support the array.

* The selectboard also voted to use $4000 for a grant administrator, and they hired Imme Maurath.
* In 2021, the selectboard used $1200 to digitize the land records.
* At our recommendation, the selectboard set aside $2500 for the Owl audiovisual system, which George said may meet the town’s AV needs.
* Mac said the selectboard spent $878 in 2022 for the clerk’s salary. We had estimated $2000 for this, but there won’t be that much available if we recommend $44,000 for Meeting House improvements. She discussed this with Kord who said it could be paid another way. Other projects might not need all that has been voted for them.

 There were no comments from those present about any of this.

* Discuss and act on funds for the Meeting House – Mac noted that Bill has comments and a motion that he would like to make, and Bill read a statement of his thoughts. From his view as Energy Committee chair, he is disappointed that no improvements have been made to the energy situation at the Meeting House. He blames no one for this and is not angry, but we are about to enter the second winter since the ARPA Committee began work, and the building is still burning about 1,000 gallons of oil per year. We have a long list of projects of improvements needed for the Meeting House, with reliable estimates for a few but not most of them. It is clear that it will cost a great deal of money to complete all of these projects, perhaps several hundred thousand dollars just to complete the most important projects. Today we have to decide how to use the remaining $44,000. Bill said it makes sense to use the remaining $44,000 to pursue some large grants. He trusts Cathy’s and Mac’s experience with securing grants and their view that we can succeed with this. Cathy has already done research and identified opportunities. He thinks we should pursue grants, and “swing to the fences.”

 Bill made the following motion: To have the remaining $44,000 of ARPA money set aside to be used as matching funds for grants the town may secure for the purpose of making upgrades and improvements to the Meeting House. Any of the $44,000 that has not been used as matching funds by June 1, 2024 shall be made available to the Meeting House Committee to be used to make energy savings improvements to the building before the winter of 2024-25 begins, with the ultimate approval of the selectboard. Cathy seconded the motion.

 Tom asked what the date was. Bill said June 1, 2024, but he commented that if we have grants still pending then, the selectboard could retain the funds until we hear about outstanding applications. Cathy had told Bill that we need nine months to know about our applications. Cathy said by June, we will have applied for four big grants, and we’ll know about two by December. For one of those two, MERP, we do not need matching funds. The other one, the Historical Preservation grant, is for $20,000 with the town matching that amount. So by June, we’ll have a good idea of the financial need for matching funds. Cathy recently did a five-hour session on the IRA (Inflation Reduction Act), and there are all sorts of funds out there, although we need to focus on what we actually need.

 Ellen mentioned funds that the ARPA Committee had considered for the copier in the Town Office. She understands the funds for this can be found elsewhere than from the ARPA funds. Ultimately, it is all up to the selectboard.

 Mac asked about the on-demand water heater, which might be paid for with funds the Meeting House Committee already has. Bill shared information from Jeffers & Sons who looked at the heating situation. They discussed the possibility of heating the building off only one of the two heaters (each one heats a different area of the Meeting House). Unfortunately, doing that is very involved and costly, so it is not an option. There is no value in installing the on-demand water heater if we still have the oil-burners to heat the building, as they also heat the water. We need to live with the system we have and hope by spring we have clarity on how to heat the building and the water in a more energy-efficient way. There other problems that have to be dealt with like the corrosion on the inside of the oil tanks that are under the building.

 There was no further discussion, and the vote was taken on Bill’s motion. It passed unanimously.

**6. Update on selectboard approvals** – Mac repeated that at their last meeting, the selectboard approved $8000 for the pursuit of grants for the Meeting House, and they voted to send out requests for bids for the solar array.

**7. Townwide meeting on the Meeting House** – Cathy reported that the publicity is underway. She is meeting with Meg Staloff next week to set the agenda. Cathy noted that after talking with the people from the federal government, we might think about making the Meeting House an emergency center, as that could give us funds for upgrading the kitchen. She also thinks we should consider what we want to do with the Meeting House. It is a work in progress. There is a much federal money available. She will be attending another webinar for towns under 5000 population. Our meeting on the 23rd will help us know what the townspeople want. Also the Windham Regional Commisssion is encouraging us to broaden our approach to create a plan for all aspects of the town.

Mac asked if Cathy needs help from the people on the ARPA Committee, but Cathy has reached out to people who haven’t been involved before, and they will be providing help with the food and setup, etc.

**8. Review of requirements for future meetings and schedule next meeting** – Mac shared two pieces of information from the committee’s role, as approved by the selectboard. We are required to meet until the obligation of all ARPA funds or December 31,2024, whichever comes first, and we need to meet no less than one time each fiscal quarter. So we don’t have to meet again for three months. Mac said when we meet again, we can discuss the townwide meeting and review the report Meg will be preparing, which will be great to use when we apply for grants. George suggested that we meet again sooner than three months.

Cathy was asked when we would get the MERP audit, and she said it had been slowed because MERP folks are also working on the flood recovery. The application deadline has been moved to October 31. Their goal is to have the audits completed by the end of the year. She sent them a lot of information about the Meeting House needs, and they will look it over and then come here to do their own assessment. When they do that energy audit, they won’t provide cost estimates, just a list of what they see needs to be done with some idea of the priorities.

The proposals for the MERP capital funds will be competitive and will be open in 2024. We will need architectural and engineering drawings and estimates when we apply for that. Michael suggested we go ahead and start getting estimates. Cathy said we haven’t seen their audit or the guidelines for the MERP capital grants. To get good cost estimates, we need to have a clear scope of the work. Since the audit is due by the end of December, she thought we should wait until then.

She wants to find out if Windham can request bids for a design build that folds the cost of the design into the cost of the build. Different towns have different policies about that, and she has asked Kord to find out what Windham’s policy is by asking our town lawyer about it.

Tom asked when the ARPA money needs to be spent. That date is December 31, 2026. Tom said we are running out of time.

 Mac returned to the question of when to meet. Several dates were discussed. After a discussion that considered everyone’s schedule, it was decided to have the meeting on Tuesday, October 24th.

Mac thanked everyone for all their work in determining how to spend the ARPA funds.

**13. Adjourn meeting and stop recording** – Michael moved and Cathy seconded. All approved. The meeting was adjourned at 6:29 PM.

**The next ARPA meeting will be Tuesday, October 24, 2023**

Respectfully submitted,

Mary McCoy (Mac), ARPA Clerk