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By Linda Amerighi at 10:27 am, Jan 27, 2022

Sharon ARPA Advisory Committee  
January 24, 2022 Meeting Minutes  
Draft until approved at the next regular meeting

The Sharon ARPA Advisory Committee held a regular meeting at 4:30pm on January 24, 2022. The meeting was held in hybrid mode, in person at Town Hall and online via Zoom.

**Committee attendees:**

*In person*

Jill Drew

*On Zoom*

Donna DiMartino

Gretchen Hachmeister

Meghan Flanagan

Casey Flanagan

Doug Cahill

Tom Casey

Sophia Wang

Carol Flaton (joined at 5:00pm)

**Public attendees: (On Zoom)**

Donna Begley

Heather & John Ongley

Marion Williams

Eileen Fielding

1. The meeting was called to order at 4:30pm.
2. Jill Drew proposed amending the original agenda due to a schedule conflict in the Town Hall meeting room. The following amendments were approved:
  - a. Reduce the number of ARPA grant application to be reviewed: Ongley family high-speed internet (combined with the Begley family high-speed internet request), Sharon Audubon Center and Hotchkiss Library of Sharon;
  - b. Keep item 4 on the agenda to briefly mention any new applications received;
  - c. Skip item 5 & 6, and just to go over any new business that members want to raise.
3. Minutes of the January 5, 2022 meeting were approved without change.
4. Public Comment: additional public comment to be added when items were discussed.
5. Review ARPA grant applications

**a. Ongley & Begley family high-speed internet request - \$20,788.09**

- i. The Ongley & Begley families have requested quotes from Comcast to deliver high-speed internet to their homes. John Ongley said the quote from Comcast was \$20,788.09 to deliver high-speed internet to their house. They are joining with neighbors to request that Comcast run wires down Tichnor Road and Caroline Drive to serve 12 households.
- ii. Donna Begley is a school counselor. It was extremely difficult for her to work from home without access to high-speed internet when her school went remote.
- iii. Donna's neighbors are from New York and they would like to spend more time in Sharon, but the lack of internet makes it impossible for them to work from home. Donna mentioned that her neighbor has asked a quote from Comcast, which was about \$20,000.
- iv. Jill suggested approaching Comcast on behalf of this whole neighborhood. The committee asked the Ongley and Begley families to email a list of addresses under discussion to Jill, so that the committee can pinpoint those households on the map and ask Comcast for an overall quote.
- v. Jill also mentioned that the Sharon Connect Task Force is working to bring high-speed internet connection to every household in Sharon. The ARPA committee will share information with Sharon Connect after receiving an overall Comcast quote.
- vi. Given that there are about 280 homes in Sharon currently not served by Comcast, the ARPA committee should consider how much it costs to serve all 280 homes instead of only a few residents. The committee understands how difficult life can be without high-speed internet and will make this a high priority.
- vii. ARPA committee will come back with a status update regarding the specific requests from the Ongley and Begley families and overall progress for all 280 homes in a month or so.

**b. Sharon Audubon Center request - \$15,000**

- i. Eileen Fielding of Sharon Audubon told the committee that Sharon Audubon is part of the National Audubon Society. The center has diversified sources of income, but earned income dropped by \$85,500 from FY19 to FY21, primarily because of Covid-related closures of its summer camp program and other income-producing programs, including the gift shop. Moreover, National Audubon instituted layoffs and Sharon

Audubon lost one full-time and one part-time staffer, even though public usage of its trails and facilities spiked during the pandemic.

- ii. The organization was not able to apply for Covid relief programs like the federal Paycheck Protection Program because it is a local member of a national organization.
- iii. The organization is short-handed now. Normally, the organization hires a springtime education intern, who continues on through the summer and is joined by other seasonal staff in May. This year, no budget is available to put those people on in advance of the summer season. This will make it difficult to for Audubon to get its income-producing programs running.
- iv. The \$15,000 requested will be used primarily to hire education staff. Ideally, if the money is available, 1 spring staffer will be hired in mid-March to work on Maple Fest and that person will stay on to assist with school programs. This person will be joined by summer camp staff in May and June.

**c. Hotchkiss Library of Sharon request - \$3,000**

- i. The library offered an online Meditation and Stress Management class from October of 2020 to the summer of 2021. It was very popular and helped people ease the feelings of isolation, depression and anxiety brought on by the pandemic.
- ii. The requested funds will be used to extend this program from 30 minutes to 1 hour per week and expand offerings to include yoga and a naturopath. The program fits ARPA funding priorities for behavioral health because it helps build resilience and wellbeing. The program is free of charge so is a support to those who don't have means to participate in similar programs that cost money.
- iii. The cost of this program alone is more than the entire budget for the library's adult programming. Meditation teacher Marion Williams continued to volunteer her time after the money ran out for the program.
- iv. Gretchen Hachmeister said the Library's request for \$50,000 from the Town is targeted for its building project and none could be diverted to fund this program in the operating budget.

6. Additional applications/ideas for funding:

- a. Application of \$10,000 to \$20,000 ARPA fund from Sharon Daycare Center
- b. Silver Lake shore submitted a revised application

- c. Excluding \$200,000 application from Rodriguez Brothers, ARPA applications received so far total roughly \$300,000
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- 7. Other new business:  
Tom Casey made a motion to send the application from Sharon Audubon Center and the Hotchkiss Library of Sharon to the Board of Selectman for approval. The motion was approved unanimously.
  - 8. Upon unanimous approval of a motion to adjourn, the meeting concluded at 5:15pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sophia Wang