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By Linda Amerighi at 8:30 am, Sep 28, 2021

Sharon ARPA Advisory Committee
September 20, 2021 Meeting Minutes
Draft until approved at the next regular meeting

A regular meeting of the Sharon ARPA Advisory Committee was held on Sept. 1, 2021 at 6:30PM in-person at the Town Hall and via Zoom.

<u>Present in person</u>	<u>Present on Zoom</u>
Emily Soell	Meghan Flanagan
Donna DiMartino	Mary O'Reilly
Barbara Prindle	Gretchen Hachmeister
Jill Drew	Carol Flaton
Tom Bartram	Selectman Dale Jones
Tom Casey	

1. Call to order at 6:30 pm
2. Minutes of the Sept. 1 meeting were discussed. Donna DiMartino corrected Item 8, section a, number iv on page two by adding her name to the list of Committee members who would develop an assistance request form for individuals. The minutes of the Sept. 1, as thusly corrected, were unanimously approved.
3. Jill Drew provided an update on the possibility of hiring a Committee Administrator/Recording Secretary. The Committee proposal was approved by the BOS on 9/14, with a change from 4 hrs/week to a range of 16-25 hrs/month. The job listing was posted on town website and will be published for two consecutive weeks in the Lakeville Journal. The BOS and an ARPA Advisory Committee co-chair will interview candidates. The process will take until at least mid-October. A suggestion was made that the ARPA co-chairs meet that person prior to the first Committee meeting to provide orientation.
4. The BOS also approved funds for developing an ARPA Advisory Committee website. The funds will be used to purchase a website address and account at Squarespace.com. The domain name of www.sharoncovidrecovery.org and the email sharoncovidrecovery@gmail.com were proposed and approved by the Committee. Meaghan Flanagan will design the website and present it to the Committee at our next meeting. After Committee approval, the website will go live. The Committee will ask the Town Clerk to link to the ARPA website from the town website.
5. Jill Drew walked the Committee through a revised version of the proposed administrative expenses to be submitted to the BOS. The changes primarily reflected the revised estimated expense for the Committee Administrator, due to the sliding scales for hourly wage and hours per month. The ARPA Committee voted unanimously to forward the revised estimated expense budget to the Sharon BOS.

6. An ARPA Survey Subcommittee was formed to work on developing a survey to be used to solicit feedback and ideas from the residents and businesses of Sharon. Conversation ensued about how the survey should be developed and used. It was suggested that the assistance application be merged with or somehow connected to the survey. The Subcommittee will explore those options. Subcommittee members volunteered were: Emily Soell, Donna DiMartino, Meghan Flanagan, Barbara Prindle, Jill Drew.
7. Tom Bartram mentioned that there may be individuals with immediate needs and the Committee will react to those as soon as possible. Barbara Prindle agreed that those requests should not need to wait for a final survey and application to be completed. The Committee agreed to adopt an expedited process.
8. Jill Drew mentioned that because the U.S. Treasury's rules for ARPA funding are still interim, it might be prudent to consult counsel early on about ideas, before too much effort is expended on evaluating certain distributions that might not be eligible, and certainly before any disbursements are made. Emily Soell suggested there may be lawyers residing in Sharon who are familiar with the rules and might be willing to offer advice on a pro-bono basis. Tom Bartram added that it is likely the BOS will consult counsel before approving any disbursements. Estimated legal costs would be included in the budget being submitted to the BOS. Barbara Prindle suggested the Committee co-chairs reach out to the Northwest Hills Council of Governments and the towns represented to learn what they are doing.
9. During a brief review of the draft template for assistance applications, several members thought it could work well for businesses and other organizations, but expressed a worry that the draft was too wordy and confusing for individuals, and thus, could discourage applications. The Committee asked the Survey Subcommittee to explore the wording as it comes up with ideas to link the survey and application process. Meghan Flanagan mentioned designing the survey using a Google Form, which could help drive as much response as possible to the survey (and the applications) to an electronic form so that the ARPA Committee and the BOS would be able to access rich data that can be used most effectively. Carol Flaton suggested using QR codes so residents could fill out the forms on their cell phones. She urged that the form be simple. Tom Bartram noted that many in the Sharon community who might need help are not tech-savvy and the Committee needs to have an outreach and application plan that works for them. Barbara Prindle urged that, for all applications or surveys completed on paper that a Committee member (or group of members) volunteer to key that information into an electronic form. Emily Soell mentioned that email blasts are becoming less effective in reaching even the tech-savvy, as everyone's email boxes are full up. The Committee agreed that once a process is in place, posters should be put up around Town to spread the word. Gretchen Hachmeister said the Hotchkiss Library could host open houses for people to come and learn how to apply for ARPA assistance. She offered to assign a staff member one day a week to provide assistance.

10. Jill Drew asked for comments about the process to date and if there are any other ideas that should be considered for ARPA funding. Gretchen Hachmeister mentioned that the NW Arts Council had received funding and was reaching out to artists and arts organizations in the area that need assistance. She said the NW Arts Council is encouraging all towns to devote 1% of their total ARPA funding to arts organizations. Carol Flaton mentioned that she had heard from two town residents that the condition of Mudge Pond (water itself) could be improved and it might increase the usage of the Town Beach and Pond by citizens. A discussion ensued about how this could be accomplished as the water rights to Mudge Pond are privately held.

Meghan Flanagan offered to contact Parks & Rec to determine their thoughts and interest in a project such as this and whether it would be something they would seek ARPA funds for.

Emily Soell suggested the Town Hall meeting room needed acoustical panels to make hybrid in-person/online meetings more effective. The audio quality currently is unacceptable. She urged that everyone think about how to use the ARPA funds for the long-term greater good of the town. Jill Drew mentioned that the acoustics are so difficult in the meeting room that the next ARPA Advisory Committee on Oct. 6 should be Zoom only.

11. The meeting was adjourned at 7:37 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol Flaton and Jill Drew