

RECEIVED

By Linda Amerighi at 7:34 am, Nov 27, 2023

Sharon ARPA Advisory Committee

November 21, 2023 Meeting Minutes

The Sharon ARPA Advisory Committee held a regular meeting at 5:00 pm on October 17, 2023
The meeting was held via Zoom hybrid format.

Committee Attendees:

Jill Drew

Meghan Flanagan

Tom Bartram

Jean Bustillo

Donna DiMartino

Casey Flanagan (ex officio)

Gretchen Hachmeister

Public Attendees:

None

1. The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m.
2. The proposed agenda was approved.
3. Minutes of the November 21, 2023 meeting were approved as circulated.
4. Public comment: None
5. Jill started the discussion regarding the Town Hall technology upgrade. She explained that the Town had put in an RFP a year earlier for an evaluation of Town Hall's technology needs, but it was not a cohesive plan and the Town had not received any outside bids, so the decision was made not to move forward. The Town now has a better understanding of what the Town Hall needs.

Jill opened the floor to discussion, asking committee members their thoughts on what the Town Hall needs. Tom Bartram replied that the Emergency Response Center is currently operating out of the Firehouse. It should be at the Town Hall. This has never been implemented as the Town Hall does not have a generator. As this will be remedied after the parking lot resurfacing is completed and a generator installed, the Town Hall could function as the Emergency Response Center. Tom has forwarded the federal guidelines for requirements for an ERC. He added that there should be a dedicated meeting space with a secure network as well as bandwidth for several computers.

Donna talked about systems back-ups as well as the need to consolidate all the separate systems under an umbrella for protection for everyone. She also recommended standardization of e-mails so that what is sent out looks like official government e-mail. She also emphasized “privacy” standards.

Gretchen managed upgrade the Hotchkiss Library’s technology upgrade as part of overseeing the recent renovation. She recommended that Town officials look at the available options and remain flexible. She explained that the Library has set up a public meeting room for outside groups to use. Jill asked if Town Hall also wanted to maintain a private, password-protected wifi network as well as public wi-fi. She also asked if Town Hall needed to hire a part-time tech staffer or just continue with using an outside contractor. A part-time staffer could help run hybrid meetings using Town Hall equipment, among other duties. Gretchen also explained that the Library board asked her to consider what the long-term tech needs would be 5, 10, or 15 years down the line. She said experts told her that most everything will be wireless, but couldn’t agree on much else. Currently the Library backs up its data each night to a cloud backup. Protection of personal data and not sharing Library patrons’ data were very important considerations in its setup.

Jill and Donna suggested to ask the selectman to consult with other Towns such as Kent regarding how they have upgraded their Town Halls.

Tom recommended the Town contact John Field, coordinator of Region 5 of CT’s Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS), to discuss cybersecurity and setting up an emergency management center. Tom strongly suggested that an analog, copper-wire landline phone be usable at Town Hall if the current VOIP phones (voice over internet protocol) phones go down in a power outage or other event.

Meghan stressed that the ideas being suggested were important, but that a network expert would be needed to manage the bigger-picture issues. The Town should hire an IT group with municipal experience to advise it in keeping with state and federal guidelines and requirements.

Casey thanked the committee members for their input. He said he was meeting the following morning with an IT contractor to start the ball rolling. This person has offered to do an assessment of Town Hall needs. Next week, Casey will participate in the CT Conference of Municipalities (CCM) annual conference, which is hosting several vendors and forums to discuss IT needs. Also next week, he will meet with a representative of the CT Education Network (CEN), the state-owned fiber-optic internet service provider, which serves Sharon Center School, Hotchkiss Library and most towns and schools in the state. The Town had looked at joining CEN two years ago, but the prices quoted were too high. Those prices have been reduced and its cost is now on par with what Town Hall is paying for its Comcast service. CEN has several positive selling points, including its built-

in cybersecurity capacities, faster speeds, and its long experience serving most other CT towns. He commented that, in addition to the remaining ARPA funds that will be considered for use in funding the upgrade, there will likely need to be a financial commitment built into the town budget long term to keep systems and hardware up-to-date.

6. Motion made to adjourn at 5:41 p.m.

The next meeting will be held December 21, 2023 at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jean Bustillo

ARPA Secretary