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By Linda Amerighi at 7:49 am, Dec 06, 2021

Sharon ARPA Advisory Committee
December 01, 2021 Community Meeting Minutes
Draft until approved at the next regular meeting

Sharon ARPA Advisory Committee held a hybrid community meeting in person at Town Hall and on Zoom at 6:30pm on December 01, 2021.

Attendees:

Committee members in person at Town Hall

Jill Drew
Tom Bartram
Carol Flaton
Donna DiMartino
Sophia Wang

Committee members on Zoom

Gretchen Hachmeister
Tom Casey
Meghan Flanagan
Barbara Prindle
Doug Cahill
Dale Jones, Selectman (ex officio)
Casey Flanagan, Selectman (ex officio)

Ten members of the public attended in person. Roughly 25 members of the public attended via Zoom.

1. The meeting was called to order at 6:30pm. Jill Drew opened the meeting by introducing herself and all committee member attendees.
2. The proposed agenda was approved
3. Minutes of the ARPA meeting 11/15/21 were approved
4. ARPA committee objective presentation
 - a. The Board of Selectman authorized this committee over the summer, when the town received \$800,000 federal funding under the American Rescue Plan Act. First committee meeting was held in the middle of August, followed by twice-a-month meetings on the first Wednesday and third Monday of every month afterwards. Agendas and Minutes of past meetings can be found on township website as well as ARPA's own homepage (<https://www.sharoncovidrecovery.org>).
 - b. Since this \$800,000 is a federal grant, we will not have an overall town meeting to vote on disbursements, but we will have an ongoing town discussion about the ideas and applications received. Right now we are at the information-gathering stage. We have conducted a resident survey to collect suggestions and ideas. Next step is to go through applications and have public meetings to discuss each application. Then the committee will go back and look at the U.S. Treasury rules to see if each application fits in the Treasury guidelines. Once we determine an application has valid arguments under the Treasury rule, we will forward our research and the applications to the Board of Selectmen who will make the policy decisions in terms of where ARPA funding will be spent.

c. So far, the Committee received one urgent request from the Sharon Fire Department and Ambulance Squad for additional Personal Protection Equipment. It fit within the Treasury guidelines and was deemed to be urgent. The Board of Selectmen approved the funding. Decisions for all other applications will be made after January 15 – the deadline set for receipt of initial applications – so the Committee has the context of how they all fit in relation to each other.

d. According to the U.S. Treasury guidelines, ARPA grant funding is divided into the following buckets:

- i. to support the public health response;
- ii. address the negative economic impacts by COVID;
- iii. premium pay for essential workers;
- iv. two general infrastructure areas that do not need specific, direct connections to COVID are water and sewer infrastructure, broadband capability.
- v. replacement of lost town revenue due to pandemic's effect on local taxes, etc.

5. Result of resident survey and list of ideas from community – Meghan Flanagan reviewed and presented results:

a. A resident survey was conducted by the committee in both English and Spanish as an outreach effort. The survey is available online at sharoncovidrecovery.com. Printed surveys are also available at the town hall, the library and post office. We will continue collecting survey input, but the result presented during today's meeting only includes results we received by November 30. Presentation deck is available on the ARPA Advisory Committee website, sharoncovidrecovery.com.

b. Overall framework of the survey:

i. What has the Town done well during the COVID emergency, what could it have done better?

ii. Among the ideas have been suggested as possible uses of the Sharon COVID Recovery Funds, which one would you support?

iii. personal experience during the pandemic?

c. Megan presented the survey response to each question. Remarks:

i. Presented survey result is a congregation of 52 responses, it's not statistically significant, but an important first step;

ii. A possible reason many people chose 'Not Applicable' when asked about the personal impact of Covid is because many town residents are retired and their personal situations don't match what described in the question;

iii. A list of community ideas is available on the ARPA Advisory Committee website and those proposals will be discussed in the future committee meetings.

6. Open discussion highlights:

a. How should the fund be spent to help those individuals who were hit hard by COVID;

b. How to use ARPA fund to build critical infrastructure for Sharon, items on top of the list:

i. Broadband capability,

ii. Water/sewer infrastructure in the town,

iii. Reusable energy (solar);

c. Comment was also made to caution the committee that COVID is far from over yet, so some money needs to be reserved in preparation.

d. According to U.S. Treasury guidelines, ARPA funds need to be obligated by December 31, 2024 and spent by December 31, 2026. Any remaining money after December 31, 2026 needs to be returned to the federal government.

7. Unanimous approval of a motion to adjourn and the meeting concluded at 8:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Sophia Wang