

Town of Athens
ARPA Fund Informational Meeting
Tuesday, August 22nd at 7:00pm

In attendance: Tina White, Don Capponcelli, Hilary Cooke, Janet Perry, Sandi Capponcelli, Denise Randall, Krista Gay, Hannah Regier, Amber Stevens

Meeting called to order at 6:59

Sandi points out a sheet with information on the uses for ARPA funds.

Janet gives a background of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). It was signed by President Biden on March 11, 2021. It is money for cities and towns for recovery after the Covid pandemic. The money came to the state and then to towns and counties, broken down by population. The amount that Athens received was a little over \$130,000. It is to help with improvements. It can be used for grant matching funds. The uses are broader now than what they had been originally. They don't recommend that it be used for tax relief or pension funds. The town needs to track and report how it is used. The funds need to be dedicated to projects by December 2024 and they must be expended by 2026.

Janet says there are some grants that don't allow ARPA funds, or any federal funds, to be used as matching funds. She can't remember which grant that was, but one that she was inquiring for the town garage.

She asks for feedback from the public on how the funds can be used to help everyone in town. She has been getting estimates on office, bathroom and other updates for the town garage because she thinks that will help everyone in town if it doesn't get shut down. The building needs a new roof. Don has been working on the MERP program which could be used for insulation and other energy needs. Denise asks if both MERP and ARPA could be used on the garage. Janet says yes, because the MERP only covers energy related costs. She doesn't know if MERP will cover heat pumps. Don says the first round of MERP is mostly for tightening up buildings. He says it's frustrating that it can only be used on one building per town. He thinks there is more tightening up to be done on the town garage than the Community Center. Janet says the water for the town garage comes from a hose – they don't even have a sink. Don adds that the well hasn't been tested in a long time either.

Janet says those are the projects she's been working on to get information to people. She says Sandi and Don have been working on grant information.

Hilary says the garage has been on a priority list for a very long time. He asks if there is a consensus or are there other priority projects in town. Janet says the Community Center is the other project. Hannah says especially getting a vault and moving the town office to the Community Center building to have more usable space. Don goes into more detail on the community center / town office renovation plans and the budget that he and Hannah came up with for the congressional earmark grant application was about \$500,000. Don says he keeps describing the town record storage as "abysmal" on grant applications. Some of the items for the Community Center are attic insulation, solar panels, heat pumps, ADA upgrades, a vault, town office space. He mentions the architect that visited and had other ideas as well.

Hannah explains the architectural scoping process that she and Don have been getting estimates for. She says that while Janet has been getting direct quotes from contractors for individual pieces of the garage work, there is additional grant money that could be available if the town had a comprehensive scoping phase of work including schematic design and cost estimating to the USDA specs. There is grant money for this scoping phase and the selectboard just decided to move ahead on the architectural scoping for the town garage. There is a similar quote for doing scoping work for the Community Center that the town can't afford right now.

Janet says there is a lot of need in town and there's only so much money.

Hilary asks if a portion of the \$130,000 can be a matching part for other grants. Sandi says it could, but not for the garage, because she thinks if they are already using it for the garage, they've run into the issue of not being able to use federal money to match grants. Don says ARPA could be used as a match for MERP on either building. Janet says there are more grants available for the community center than for repairing the garage. Hannah thinks that isn't true. Krista asks if there are more potential grants or more money available for the Community Center. Janet says more grants, because many grants can't be applied to a town garage, unless it's being used as an emergency management team point.

Krista asks the price quote on the estimate Janet got recently for an addition to the garage. Janet says for an office, bathroom and extra storage, the price was \$90,000. Krista asks if \$90,000 of the ARPA funds could be put towards the garage and do that project with no additional cost to taxpayers. That's just the addition. Sandi says there would be at least another \$2,000 for the septic plan and additional materials for the septic. The roof and insulation on the existing structure would be extra as well but might be covered by other grants.

Krista says the disadvantage of that plan is that they'd be putting all the money toward the garage and not getting double the money if they used it for matching grants for the Community Center.

Janet says the town has to weigh which building would get more use or would benefit the townspeople more. Sandi thinks the town is leaning towards the garage because without it the equipment isn't protected when winter comes. Tina points out that the \$90,000 isn't addressing the roof or insulation. Janet says there are quotes for the roof and they are still working on grants for the insulation and roof. Tina says the ARPA funds are money in hand now.

Krista feels strongly that the road crew needs a bathroom. She is nervous that if they commit all the money there and it doesn't cover the project. Krista asks when they would know the total cost of the garage project. Janet says she doesn't know. Sandi says that because the crew spends time in the garage, OSHA requires there to be facilities in the garage. Sandi says that the Community Center at the moment is a usable building. Krista says that a municipality isn't subject to federal OSHA, but states can adopt a state version of OSHA. Sandi says that that is what she is reading is the state requirements. Sandi and Krista both say it's important for current and future employees to have a bathroom. Krista again asks what the complete cost of the garage work will be. She wants to make sure it wouldn't go over budget.

Hannah says that the architectural scoping work, including a full cost estimate, would be delivered in mid February 2024. Hannah says she knows Janet is getting quotes another way and she hopes that the scoping work will be useful and the town isn't wasting \$10,000 in grant money.

Tina White says that it's important to work on the existing building, not just the bathroom addition. Hannah says the scoping work will include all the projects in its estimates. Tina says those quotes won't come in less than the quotes Janet is getting. Tina is concerned that there would be a nice new addition, but the portion of the garage that's used the most still doesn't have a roof and isn't safe for the employees to be in. She wants to know why the roof and insulation isn't being suggested as a use for this money. Tina thinks that the bathroom is important, but that the town needs to protect the structure of the existing building that houses the equipment. Denise suggests putting in just a bathroom, but not an office and storage area.

Don says there are two bids on mold mitigation and insulation on the garage, the lower of which are \$56,000. He says if there are higher energy expenses for the community center then the MERP money should be used up there. If not, then the MERP money should be directed to the garage. He says they might not have any choice but to direct MERP to the garage. Tina wants to know if the MERP money is in hand. Everyone says no. Tina says it's been 35 years that the town has been talking about a bathroom for the garage. Hannah says that one thing about having the money in hand is that it can be used to leverage the other grants and it makes sense to be strategic in how it's used. It's \$130,000, but MERP can cover up to \$500,000 of energy expenses which could be combined with the ARPA funds for a whole project.

Sandi says they could reduce the addition down to just a bathroom, but she says looking long term, it would be better to have an office area that visitors to the garage can enter, so as not to be an insurance liability.

Krista tries to add up the expenses for the garage. She's concerned with the mold in the garage and it being an unsafe working environment. Krista says any money should be put into testing and mitigating the mold. Janet says the main thing is to get the roof replaced. Sandi says the roof has to be replaced first because it's leaking for years and getting into the insulation is why there's mold in the building.

Tina asks if the MERP grant can be used for the bathroom. No, it is for energy upgrades.

Tina thinks the mold and leaking roof is also a major issue. It's unsafe for them to be in the building.

Sandi says that the town needs to decide the best place to put the money and how to divide it among projects. Maybe just a bathroom and a roof are the first priorities, then work on the insulation part next. Sandi and Hannah both say there are a lot of moving parts currently and the town doesn't know what exact additional funding will be coming in.

Hannah says there is a consultant coming on board in the next couple of weeks via WRC, Maggie Foley, who should be able to help with this prioritizing process. It doesn't have to be decided tonight where the ARPA money gets used. Maggie can help create a package of what can be done with the different funding sources.

Janet explains three bids she got for the roof: last fall, a \$20,490 quote to replace the roof. This spring: a quote for \$31,000 to paint and spray the roof. The last quote was \$59,000 to replace the roof. Janet hasn't gone back to the original contractor who bid the \$20,000 because everything has been in limbo. The quotes are from Brattleboro roofing, someone in Rutland, and Build Co. Build Co. was the contractor Janet asked for the estimate on the garage addition and roof replacement. Jancewicz isn't interested. They are thinking of putting the same corrugated roofing on there that is currently on there. Don thinks

4" of foam board should be added as well, but there is an issue with adding to the weight of the roof because of the snow load capacity of the structure. Denise suggests someone in Newfane who does roofing and will get his number to Janet.

Priorities from around the room

Tina: Roof on the town garage is highest priority

Don: Also thinks maybe using \$20,000 of the ARPA on the roof

Hilary: He says the town crew has endured pretty rough working conditions and it must be hard to come to work if they look at the conditions in neighboring towns. He is sensitive to that. He also says he got his tax bill and appreciates that it's been pretty level the last few years. Improvement to the garage using the unencumbered money is probably the best expense right now.

Amber: Roof and mold mediation. Hopefully the town can get more grants for the bathroom.

Hannah: Reads email from Lynn Morgan: "I would like to see the ARPA funds used for repairing the following town buildings in order of perceived need: maintenance office and garage; town office; community center/future town office."

Hannah: Thinks that there will be a lot more information and help coming, and that the town should use Maggie Foley to help prioritize and lay things out. She thinks most of the ARPA money should probably be used for the garage, and she also wants to put aside some of the ARPA money to be used as matching for a vault grant. That would be a commitment to getting a vault. Sandi says if they do that maybe the town can get figures on how much a vault would cost.

Denise suggests using the MERP for the garage insulation and ARPA for a roof and maybe a bathroom. Then down the road think about office and storage. She thinks it wouldn't cost a lot to box in an area inside the door for a small office.

Tina asks if there are other grants that would help with moving the town office. Hannah says there aren't any that she's aware of that are large enough and focused on it. She applied for a congressional earmark grant that the town ended up not getting. That would have been the scale that would have helped that project. The town can apply again next year, although things may still be messy in Washington and who knows if budgets will be passed. Tina says she agrees with Hannah's idea to put aside some money to be used for a vault – she had to do some research recently and says the land records are not a good situation currently. Sandi agrees it's a good idea and says that the land records are in "ovens" that would burn up if there was a fire.

Krista asks why there hasn't been a port-a-potty at the town garage. Cost is the reason. Janet says it was \$135/month last time they looked into it. Denise says they do have the town office bathroom if they need it. Janet says she looked at incinerating toilets.

Don asks if another ARPA hearing could be warned because this one was on short notice. Sandi says maybe once there has been a discussion with Maggie Foley, there could be another meeting that she's involved in.

Sandi says they do want to spend the \$2,000 for Michael Marquis for septic design and they needed to have this open meeting first before any ARPA money could be spent. Hannah says the septic design is

only good for a period of time, so they want to be sure they are moving towards having a bathroom. Sandi says Marquis' offer is only good until October. Sandi says the permit is good for one or two years but the design should be good indefinitely because they aren't adding anything to it. The perking has been done already.

Denise moves to adjourn. Janet seconds. Put to a vote: all in favor. Adjourned at 7:45