

Bristol Town Administrator

From: Tasha Ball <tballwillowell@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 6, 2023 1:59 PM
To: knight@gmavt.net; Kris Perlee; Alison Thompson DaBica
Cc: Ian Albinson; Bristol Town Administrator
Subject: ARPA Update re Willowell
Attachments: ARPA FOLLOW UP LETTER.pdf

Hello Good Folks of Bristol,

On this sunshine-filled town meeting day, please find the attached letter with some exciting updates regarding Willowell's proposed use of ARPA funds.

We secured matching funds and have expanded the scope of our project to include low-income housing and workforce development.

Please share this letter with other members of the ARPA committee as you see fit.

Best,
Tasha

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Tasha Ball
she/her
Administrative Director

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"Cultivating healthy communities by connecting people to the arts, education, the environment and each other."

March 6, 2023

Dear Bristol ARPA Committee,

We are excited to share that we have been awarded a Vermont Community Recovery and Revitalization Grant (CRR grant). We first became aware of this grant from Valerie sharing the link and encouraging us to apply. These funds will be used as matching funds for the ARPA funding should our proposal be selected. We have identified a parcel of land in Bristol, secured a builder, and are ready to break ground on this project this spring.

Applying for the CRR grant also gave us the opportunity to expand the scope of our project. The proposal we initially submitted to you (the ARPA committee) was solely for expanding and sustaining Wren's Nest Preschool. We have expanded the scope of this project to include a low income housing unit that will host our AmeriCorps members who move from all around the country to come to work and train with us. **We see this project as now touching three key issues for the town of Bristol: childcare, low income housing, and workforce development.**

Willowell has a 22 year history of bringing AmeriCorps members to serve for 1-2 years with our organization. Over the years we have brought close to 30 members to Vermont to work at our programs. These members make a living stipend of federal minimum wage and dedicate their year working with the youth of Vermont. The mission of the AmeriCorps service is to alleviate poverty and build capacity in non-profits throughout the state. Finding members who were eager to dedicate a year of their lives to service was never an issue until recently.

We have hosted members who relocated to work for us from as far away as Mississippi, Oregon, and Washington. Now the folks we interview would like to come to Vermont for the positions, but cannot find suitable, affordable housing. Building low income housing into our project will bring new young people to the state of Vermont to work in education and human services.

Finding qualified teachers is a huge deficit in the early education orbit, but Willowell's history with this program shows that more times than not, the members put down roots and stay here to continue teaching. Our statistics show that 50% of the AmeriCorps members who spent a year or more at Willowell went into teaching as their full time career. Twelve percent went into fields of human services, and 65% stayed in Vermont after serving and continue to teach in our rural communities.

The growth of our school will allow us to add 3 more full time spots (allocating at least 20% of all the spots to low and moderate income families), pay our teachers a stronger livable wage, hire more staff, and offer more enrollment opportunities to low income families. Having our own location will allow us to remain in Bristol for the foreseeable future (something that is a bit uncertain as tenants on a working farm), expand our summer programming (which is historically wait listed the week it opens), and bring young people into our community to learn and train as outdoor early educators.

We know you've had a lot of wonderful proposals and you're working diligently to allocate the funds, but we wanted to let you know the changes to our initial plans, as well as the wonderful news of the matching funds that will allow us to execute this project effectively and efficiently in the coming year.

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.

Best,



Tasha Ball
Administrative Director
Willowell Foundation