

ARPA Advisory Committee Report to Selectboard

Purpose

Bristol received a little over a million dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to help the municipality recover from the effects of COVID. The ARPA Advisory Committee was charged by the Selectboard to “solicit community input, receive and develop lists of potential projects or programs for ARPA funding, identify priorities, and bring recommendations forward.”

Overview

The **ARPA Advisory Committee Funding Recommendations List** (“Recommendations List”) represents the projects the Committee recommends the Selectboard to fund. The order of these items reflects community member ranking of the recommendations.

It is our hope that all or nearly all of the items on the Recommendations List can be funded. We propose that the Selectboard fund as many as possible, starting at the top. Where grants or other funding can be secured, those funds should be used to augment the ARPA money.

Suggestion
Outreach by the Committee resulted in over 500 suggestions. Though not all of the ideas can be funded with ARPA money, the Committee strongly hopes that many of these good ideas will be put into action with various alternate funding sources in the coming years.

ARPA Advisory Committee Funding Recommendations List:

1. Bristol Family Center sprinklers so they can expand to provide more childcare spots
2. Grant writing position for the town to leverage additional money to fund more projects
3. Turning Point Center to meet growing addiction support needs
4. Air conditioning/heat pumps for Holley Hall
5. Skate park renovations including adding a section for younger kids
6. Resume farmers market or other support for small local producers to reach residents
7. Outdoor meeting/classroom space at Lawrence Memorial Library
8. Redesign Pine Street (when water line improvements made) to create safe pedestrian pathway
9. Bus shelters
10. Electric charging stations
11. Rescue squad equipment upgrades
12. Elevator in Masonic Hall to make access easier so that programming can be expanded for seniors
13. Wrens Nest support for construction so they can expand to provide more child care spots
14. Funding to continue exploration of necessary zoning changes to add housing
15. Funding for engineering studies to explore creating Handicap Accessible Trails on town parks (Eagle, Memorial, Coffin, Sycamore)
16. Bike racks in public locations
17. Bus for Recreation Department to use for programs
18. Dog park
19. Upgraded sound system to be used at 4th of July and other outdoor town events
20. E-ink/LCD Message Board (Fire Station or at Walgreens/Shaw's sign)

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ARPA Advisory Committee Process

The Committee met 13 times between March 2022 – February 2023. All meeting agendas, minutes, and meeting materials are on the [website](#). At the initial meeting March 7, 2022, the committee articulated hopes and goals for the work, resulting in the following principles which guided the Committee throughout the year:

Guiding Principles/Values

- Serve broadest # of residents and serve largest spectrum of community
- Use money for one-time expenditures that invest in Bristol’s future (not create an on-going expense)
- Attract additional funds to Bristol

The committee also reviewed ARPA requirements, considered recommendations from the Vermont League of Cities & Towns, and charted a course for community engagement at that first meeting.

In April, May and June 2022, the committee convened four focus groups to hear feedback from

- 1) **Business Owners,**
- 2) **Municipal Employees,**
- 3) Folks working with **Children and Youth,** and
- 4) People working in **Non-Profit Agencies and Organization** providing services to Bristol residents.

Over the summer, committee members attended multiple events and festivals, stood at the transfer station (dump), and canvassed outside the grocery store (Shaw’s) inviting feedback from citizens. Also, over the summer there was an online survey and postcards available at the library and town office as alternate ways for people to share their thoughts. In September the committee sponsored a free spaghetti supper (with free childcare) at the elementary school to gather more input. All told, these efforts yielded **hundreds** of terrific ideas from community members.

The focus groups, postcards, ideas and feedback from residents all consistently highlighted three areas of greatest need:

Greatest Challenges:

- Housing
- Childcare
- Transportation

With hundreds of ideas submitted, the Committee received help from Middlebury College Professor Jessica Teet’s Data Methodology class which entered all of the data into a spreadsheet and coded the data by source of idea (postcard, survey, focus group, etc.), and

Suggestion

Some ideas submitted indicated that community members may not be aware of existing programs and services. The Committee sees a need for improved networking and collaboration among existing programs and services, as well as amplified communications and marketing of them to ensure that community members are aware of and can access what already exists.

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type of idea (recreation, housing, infrastructure, etc.). This allowed the Committee to evaluate the submissions in different ways.

Following review of the spreadsheet prepared by Professor Teets' class, each committee member identified the projects they found most appropriate for this ARPA funding, and why. Anything mentioned by two or more committee members became our working Recommendations List. Items mentioned once were compiled on a list called "Tier 2".

Recognizing a mismatch between the greatest needs identified (shortages and affordability of housing and childcare) and the ideas submitted (which largely focused on small projects), the committee discussed the challenges of addressing the great and pressing needs of housing and childcare and decided to proceed with the existing input from the community while advocating for ways (other than direct ARPA funding) that the town can support and work toward affordable housing.

The Committee chose not to recommend using ARPA funding for the position of a mental health/social worker for Bristol Police Dept (BPD) despite strong consensus around the importance of supporting mental health. The Committee felt that such a position was not appropriate for ARPA funding because the Police District is not town-wide and because funding this position would create an ongoing expense line in the town budget. Nonetheless, the Committee wanted to encourage the Selectboard to consider this critical need and hopes that the town will be able to allocate other resources to address it.

At the January meeting the Committee revisited the entire list yet another time with the values & challenges lenses. And finally, the committee engaged in a round of elimination of

- projects which likely could not be completed within the ARPA timeframe
- projects which were outsized in scope/expense relative to values and themes
- projects which likely had other funding sources

This produced a final list of 20 recommendations. This list was put to the community via a ranking survey shared on Front Porch Forum three times in January 2023, and was also sent home with all families with students at Bristol Elementary School. Two hundred and seventy-seven residents completed the ranking survey to order the ideas according to their preference. The final Recommendation List reflects this community prioritization of projects to guide the Selectboard's decision-making.

The committee proposes that the Selectboard fund as many items as possible from the Recommendations List, starting at the top.

Where grants or other funding can be secured,

Suggestion

While spurred by the presence of ARPA funds, the MOST important work of this committee was engagement of the community. Creating multiple forums for citizens to share their concerns and perceived needs as well as dreams and visions for the community was a wonderful opportunity for the Selectboard to hear what our residents care about. The ARPA Committee recommends that the Selectboard plan to conduct a "Needs Census" on a regular basis – perhaps every 10 years – to solicit this type of input from the community, using a multi-pronged approach as modeled by the ARPA Advisory Committee in the past year.

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use that instead of or to augment ARPA money. If no external funding sources are available, use ARPA money. Proceed down the list until all are funded or the money runs out.

The committee is also sharing Tier 2 ideas with the Selectboard and strongly encourages the Selectboard to actively work to fund these worthy projects. Further, the Committee has shared Tier 2 ideas with a number of related organizations in the community and is encouraging them to also keep the projects in mind when accessing funding. Over time, the committee hopes that many of these good ideas shared by our neighbors will be put into action with various alternate funding sources in the coming years, and that the Selectboard and other organizations in the community will actively continue to problem solve around the three most critical needs identified in the community (Housing, Childcare, and Transportation) as well as the challenges most exacerbated by COVID (mental health, social isolation).

Respectfully submitted,

The Bristol ARPA Advisory Committee: Betsy Blair, Diane Cushman, Alison DaBica, Mike Dash, Porter Knight, John McCormick, Kris Perlee, Robert Rooker, Helen Young

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Attachments/Links

1. ARPA Advisory Committee Funding Recommendations List & Tier 2 Recommendation List
2. Impact for COVID

Agendas, meeting notes, & other meeting materials at <http://bristolvt.org/arpa-funding-advisory-committee/>

NEAT TV (<https://neatbristol.com/>) Video On Demand, search ARPA

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Attachment #1: Summary of Primary and Tier 2 Recommendations

ARPA Advisory Committee Funding Recommendations List:

1. Bristol Family Center sprinklers so they can expand to provide more childcare spots
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3. Turning Point Center to meet growing addiction support needs
4. Air conditioning/heat pumps for Holley Hall
5. Skate Park renovations including adding a section for younger kids
6. Resume farmers market or other support for small local producers to reach residents
7. Outdoor meeting/classroom space at Lawrence Memorial Library
8. Redesign Pine Street (when water line improvements made) to create safe pedestrian pathway
9. Bus shelters
10. Electric charging stations
11. Rescue squad equipment upgrades
12. Elevator in Masonic Hall to make access easier so that programming can be expanded for seniors
13. Wrens Nest support for construction so they can expand to provide more child care spots
14. Funding to continue exploration of necessary zoning changes to add housing (looking into increased housing density, increased sewer capacity, increased parking)
15. Funding for engineering studies to explore creating Handicap Accessible Trails on town parks (Eagle, Memorial, Coffin, Sycamore)
16. Bike racks in public locations
17. Bus for Recreation Department to use for programs
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Tier 2 Recommendation List

Ideas of great merit that the Committee hopes will be funded in the coming years

Trails/Parks

- Repair Memorial Park
- Trail Network upgrades, incl parking
- bike/walk trails
- South St River access

Other recreation

- Outdoor dining
- Yard waste/town compost
- Farmers Market/Local Ag support/Community Garden
- more pickleball courts
- bike fleet
- water fountain at town green
- Little Free Library boxes

Infrastructure

- upgrade financial systems and IT systems for town
- Improved community-wide internet/wifi
- updated cell service & broadband
- pressure regulators in homes/offer low flow faucets Prayer Rock Safety
- energy audits/improvements to town buildings (including library)
- park n ride at Mt Abe w solar panels
- Second road in/out of Mt Abe
- Little Free Pantry

Housing

- buy/build mid range or starter homes then sell and use money for more
- renovate/invest to help seniors age in place and turn part of home to rental income or condo

Other

- Mental health/social worker for BPD
- electric school busses (work with school district and other towns ARPA \$)

Worthy Ideas removed from Recommendations list for reasons noted:

- solar panels on town/school properties-make town electric, bury power lines took out because town already bought into solar and plans to install solar on future town buildings; we have no control over school buildings; burying power lines aesthetic but expensive and not aligned with priorities

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- **Affordable housing/senior housing**
Housing is a critical need and we encourage the Selectboard to stay focused on ways to grow affordable housing stock in Bristol, but we received no concrete proposals for how to do that with ARPA funds.
- **Public restrooms**
We encourage the Selectboard to consider an accessible port-o-let on/near park or at least signage to restrooms available to the public in buildings throughout town
- **Community Garden/Land W Pleasant for garden**
There is a well used community garden just outside the village. We encourage broader promotion of that in case citizens are unaware of it. Housing is critically needed and if the Pleasant Street lots can provide housing that is a priority.
- **Outdoor community pool**
There seems to be interest in an outdoor community pool and/or greater public access year round to the existing indoor pool at Mt Abe. The pool at Mt Abe is a precious resource and we encourage the town Rec Dept to work with Mt Abe to make it more available to the community, especially for lessons. This should be a year round priority
- **Community Care Fund (emergency \$)**
We appreciate the concept of having a pool of money available to help local people in an emergency, but this is not an allowed of COVID funds and we think would also be hard for town staff to administer.
- **Roof over the ice rink**
We encourage the Selectboard to work with the Recreation Club and other stakeholders to explore this, which would provide valuable space year round for multiple events and activities including skating. However we removed it from consideration for ARPA funds as it is very expensive without providing critical impact to the values/challenges presented in our year of data gathering.

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Attachment #2:

Impact from COVID (from survey of community)

What negative consequences have you and your family experienced due to covid? Select all that apply. 222 ⓘ

