

ARPA Informational Meeting
Tuesday, December 7, 2021
7:00pm

The meeting began in person at the Bakersfield Town Hall and via zoom at 7:00pm.

Attendees: Brenda Churchill, John West, Tami Brennan, and via zoom: Katie Buckley, Linda McCall, Leilani Ward, Bruce Douglas

Katie Buckley presented information regarding ARPA on Power Point slides, which explained that the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) is a 1.9 trillion dollar stimulus package that became law on 3/11/2021, in an effort to provide funding to fight COVID-19 and lessen the health and economic impact. 350 billion dollars have been issued to state and local governments through the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds and will be distributed through the U.S. Dept of the Treasury which is subject to Interim Final rule requirements that were adopted on May 10, 2021, by the U.S. Treasury. State and Local governments are still waiting for the Final Rule to be issued. The ARPA funds given to Vermont, total \$1,250,000,000.00 with \$1,049,287,303.00 going to the State; \$121,202,550.00 allotted for “counties”, which in Vermont has been reallocated to municipalities; \$20,721,902.00 to Metro Cities, and \$58,788,245.00 allocated to Non-Entitlement Units of Government (NEUs).

Bakersfield ARPA funds total \$396,973.76, of which the town has already received half, \$198,486.88, this last August/September 2021, and will receive the second half in August/September 2022. The town is responsible, through the Select Board, to report the dispersed ARPA funds directly to the U.S. Treasury, there is no middleman. The annual reporting is due by April 30, each year, from 2022 to 2027.

All the funds given through ARPA must be obligated and committed to projects/grants by Dec 31, 2024, and must be spent by Dec. 31, 2026. All funds not committed or spent by their deadlines, must be returned to the U.S. Treasury.

Katie went over the Planning framework to help municipalities achieve maximum impact from their ARPA money and how to determine its best use. She covered the importance of effective governing of the funds including the accounting and reporting rules. She stressed the importance of patience and planning by coordinating Bakersfield’s funds with State ARPA funds and Federal funds, as well as local program funding, to be able to stretch and make the most of the funding that we’ve been given. We can pool our funds with those of other towns and we can transfer our funds to non-profits or to another third party. The goal being to aim for the best uses for long-term Health and

Economic recovery. The funds can also be used by the town to hire someone to use the ARPA money to get more money. Our ARPA money may be given out in grants that residents apply for. There is a Cold Hollow Cooperation Trust that is separate from ARPA, looking for outside grants. There is virtual meeting tomorrow night at 6:00pm.

Katie said that the first step to determine eligibility is to identify the project. If you carry out work on the project during interim Final Rule, then anything approved during the interim rule will remain during the Final Rule. Katie said that she does not anticipate that the Final Rule will be more restrictive than the Interim Final Rule. Katie said that they were putting together a Program of How to Write Grants to compete. She said that you can tell many stories about one project. For example, The General Store project would be a Food Source that gives access to staples and local food. It is also a job provider, as well as a Historical marker. It was mentioned that Senator Leahy has How to Write a Grant on his website. VLCT has language to be used in grants. On Thursday, the 9th, there will be a webinar on how the infrastructure money will go through Vermont. There is also USDA money. Brenda said that we would have another meeting with Katie in January.

Katie listed the 7 eligible categories to spend ARPA funds: Public Health; Negative Economic impacts, Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities, Premium Pay for Essential Workers (Essential work being work that requires face to face contact and cannot be done remotely), Infrastructure (water, sewer, and Broadband), Lost Revenue Replacement, and Administrative Costs. Within the 7 categories, there are 66 Expenditure Categories which are listed in the slides posted on the town website below these minutes.

Categories that are not eligible for ARPA funds use are: A match for other federal grant funds, Pension funds, Infrastructure not approved by ARPA, Rainy day funds or reserves, or paying on outstanding debt.

Katie's slides included General Information regarding spending and annual reporting requirements with a Compliance and Reporting Guidance link on VLCT's ARPA webpage, as well as links to other town plans of usage to give examples and ideas. These slides are posted on the town website below these minutes.

You can find more information at arpa@vlct.org and <https://www.vlct.org/resources/american-rescue-plan-information>

Katie works closely with the 11 Regional Planning Commissions and can be reached for questions at kbuckley@vlct.org

Questions were asked about the Essential worker's premium pay. Katie said that the essential workers portion can be used toward bonus pay.

Josh West asked about funding for the video/sound equipment needed to provide for hybrid meetings which look like they are here to stay. Katie said that the expense for the video/sound equipment would qualify for ARPA funds because they allow for engaging with the public and allow the town government to be transparent and give flexibility of meeting times and attendance.

John said that he would set up a Bakersfield YouTube channel to enable residents to view recorded meetings. There is no cost for this, and the recording will be available on YouTube for a limited amount of time, determined by YouTube. The official record of meetings are the hard copy minutes that are kept in the town vault and on the town website, which enable them to be accessed remotely.

One question asked was how water and sewer qualify to be able to use COVID funds. Katie said that there were 3 pieces of infrastructure given government approval for ARPA funds: water, sewer and broadband.

Brenda said that there is a company that is selling a system that would run our water pipes. The town's current piping system is on a timer that tells the water reservoir to refill at certain times whether it is needed or not. This system would be usage driven, automatically refilling when usage determines the need. Its efficiency keeps the town from over pumping or under pumping. She said that she asked our Water Dept to reach out to the state. Katie said that we might be able to access the State Revolving Fund, NRA and State ARPA money and use money from all three sources to bring down the cost to the town.

Rosalie asked who has the final say where this money goes. Brenda said that the Select Board is the arbiter of how the funding is approved. The board determines if it's eligible and where the money is spent. The board has authority to issue and approve the funds to the project and then must report directly to the U.S. Treasury.

Some towns are forming ARPA committees- an ad hoc committee.... They search for interested residents with an expertise in money and gather input from the Public and make recommendations to the Select Board.

Katie stressed patience in determining the towns projects and stressed that it takes careful planning to make the most of the money that we've been given. She said to wait and see how the state is going to spend their money on infrastructure and learn how to access some of their money to augment our own, so that ours will go further. Brenda said that our ARPA money was in an interest-bearing account, and we are allowed to keep the interest. That right now, it used to pay the administrators pay, which is Brenda, and the recording clerk for minutes.

The question was asked that when we start getting some submissions, how do we do vetting? Katie said that you start with listening sessions. And then try to use programs at the state level...Rental assistance, Utility assistance, Homeowner's assistance for mortgages, taxes, etc., to use with your ARPA funds.

Linda said that she likes the idea of mailing out a survey and putting a message in the Town Report for Town Meeting Day. It's a great way to get the word out. Brenda said that in order to have grants, we need to have data and it can be dovetailed into a survey.

Brenda said that the VLCT website is a great resource. We have money that we want to spend...that we want the residents of the town to spend. Democracy requires you to participate and this is a democracy.

A recording of this meeting will be uploaded onto the Bakersfield YouTube channel and posted on Front Porch Forum.

Meeting minutes recorded by Tami Brennan.