

ARPA Meeting
Tuesday, February 28, 2023
6:00pm

Brenda began the meeting at 6:00pm.

Those present were Brenda Churchill, John West, Ginger Parent, Mark LaRoche, Nicky and Sam Cribb, Alice and Gary Foote, Amber Foote, Linda McCall, Bill Irwin, Cheryl Derue, Katie Forand, Dan Forand, Rosalie Williams, Matt Hull, Tami Brennan

Brenda began by saying that this would be a casual meeting and Robert's Rules will not be in effect, just the obligation to be kind and considerate. She said she wanted to review the requests that have been received so far. She said the previous forms were not in her binder as expected but she recalled that she received a proposal from the Historical Society for the building loan required to save the foundation from collapse. Brenda asked attendees to come up and refresh what they had put in their ARPA proposal for. She said that she had just received a proposal from the Town Clerk of Bakersfield for funds toward the temporary man hours required to upload the Town Land Records into the NEMRC land records module for a digital backup of the town records. The other previous requests were from the library, the Fairfield Community Center, and is expecting one from the Town of Bakersfield for equipment which has been written and is waiting for final approval from Mac.

Brenda reminded those gathered that we were not required to spend this money until 2024 and it doesn't have to be out of the bank until 2026. She said they are still taking new proposals and will form a Citizen Advisory Committee to review the proposals. They will preapprove and state the reasons for preapproval. Then it goes before the Select Board. Brenda said that if she doesn't get reelected then someone else will be administering the ARPA funds.

Brenda read the Town Clerk proposal letter to request ARPA funds to digitalize land records, aloud to the attendees.

Linda McCall said that she had new information on the Historical Society. She said there was a question when we submitted our ARPA proposal last April, as to whether the HS was a 501C3 and it has been, and it still is, and she has the paperwork to document that and that a copy of the 501C3 paper was included in the packet that the HS had submitted. She said the HS made their first loan payment last July for \$4917.00, and \$1636.59 was interest. She said in December the HS was presented with a bill from the town attorney that the town had hired to draw up the loan paperwork, which the HS paid. John asked what the attorney fees were for, and Linda said that the trustee of public funds had their attorney draw up the note and that it was charged to the HS. Linda

reminded those present that the reason for the ARPA request was for restoration costs due to frost damage to the foundation during Covid and Covid delayed them from getting a structural engineer in there to assess damage and the engineers report was required for grants applied so they didn't qualify.

Bill Irwin spoke in support of the library. He said that he heard about the asbestos flooring there and as an employee for the Dept of Health, he said that asbestos is a very serious health concern. Bill said that he advocates the floor be removed and not just contained. He said he knows that you can contain it, but this is a building that is predominately used by families and children to learn a love of books. They will be most likely on the floor, and they are the most susceptible to harm from a carcinogen like Asbestos. He would hope that the folks making decisions about ARPA funds seriously consider ARPA money to go toward getting that thoroughly removed. He said that he was glad to hear that there is a second go at the ARPA funds, he had previously heard that the money had mostly gone toward one thing and that was disappointing.

Brenda said that she had heard that they may be giving us more money. She said that we haven't hired a grant writer yet to enable these funds to generate more funds but would put that off until after town meeting.

Matt Hull, Chief of the Fire Dept., and Ginger Parent, Assistant Chief, spoke of the need to replace the current First Responder vehicle. Ginger said that it is costing more money to fix than it is to run. She said their mechanic said it might make it mechanically for up to 24 months if it doesn't rust out from underneath them. Ginger said that in the past year, they got 60 medical calls, which averages to 1 per week with multiple covid calls. She said that they started a vehicle replacement fund for the last few years to try to prepare but we are not going to meet the mark for what we'll need to spend for what our needs are, and they need help. Ginger said that Bakersfield has residents that we cannot reach in our regular vehicles. She said that they do not charge for any of their calls, so there is no financial recoup. Matt said that Bakersfield is interested in upping our license to an A level which has a higher level of medical skills that would allow us to start IVs on scene and certain medications go with that level. Ginger said that she personally has put in over 200 hours of training in 2022, She said that they are a volunteer squad and that might give the picture of a bunch of hillbillies and that is not the case in Bakersfield. Ginger said that she is a full-time fire fighter and works in 3 districts and she has seen that nobody works harder than Bakersfield. She said they meet once a week and they are here for our community. She said we are excited for our community in Bakersfield and we're ready, but we need the equipment to do it. Ginger said they recently started out to one call and the brakes went out. She said they did end up making it to the call, but they need help. Ginger said they would like to purchase a truck for First Response, instead of a SUV type vehicle like they have now, that will also serve for Fire response. Matt said that they have made no decision on specific trucks yet. He

said the vehicle they currently have was one they received on a grant, and it was free from Williston. Matt said the vehicle is a 2004 and we had to put some money into it when we got it but it has been kept up well and served us well. He said that they thought that a truck with an extra cab and a pull-out box would work well. They got one quote for a Tahoe, and it was \$90,000.00. Brenda asked about used. Matt said if they could find a good used one that they wouldn't have to put any money into and would meet our needs that would work but those are hard to come by. He said even new ones are hard to come by. He said that the calls in need of first response is increasing by leaps and bounds. He said the truck would need to be all wheel drive or 4/wheel drive, almost amphibias, so that they can access hard to reach places. He said the vehicle would double up on the fire scene and carry their air packs so it will be going for every call. He said that some of these remote locations are hard for Enosburg rescue to get to. Matt said that this would make it a lot easier for our community and for our responding members. He said if we find something today, we probably wouldn't get it for 12 months, so this really needs to be done within the next 12 months. Matt said that they have officially put together a written proposal and he gave it to Brenda. Brenda asked if they had looked for grants. Matt said that there are a multitude of grants that Todd has researched, and they are starting to dry up. He said it seems to be that a lot of the grants are given to larger facilities and are 50/50, so not just free money and it's very detailed as to what you can ask for. Brenda said that we want to make the ARPA funds go as far as possible and 50/50 is something we can work for. Matt said that they are not asking for 100% but are asking for a percentage. Brenda said this is not going to raise the tax base and we want to get equipment that is going to have a long-term effect on the town. She said this is good stuff. She said that we would all look at proposals together by having a Citizen Advisory Committee to review these requests on their merits because we can show that. Matt said they like to think ahead and budget ahead. Matt asked when the last Final Rule for ARPA was updated. Brenda said that there has been nothing since the last final rule and there have been 3 or 4 final rules so far. John West said that this one is the longest version so far at several hundred pages. He said he had just put together a grant application sheet that was a simple questionnaire to gather pertinent information and within a week, the Rule was updated, and it changed enough that we couldn't use the form. Matt said that he had read some of the final rule and the wording was kind of ambiguous. John said that interpretation is another part of it, the wording can go a lot of ways. Brenda said we rely a lot on VLCT to answer questions about that. She said we spend a lot of money to VLCT, which is for town officials, and they are continually giving us guidance. John said that some towns have used the money. He thinks it might have been Hyde Park that paved their roads with it and then the final rule changed but they were grandfathered because that had been allowed by the final rule at the time. Brenda said that she attends VLCT clinics frequently and they are using the term "clawback" for not expenditures that are not approved, and they want the money back. We don't want to do that. She said we are not in a huge hurry to

get rid of the money although there are some people that would like it tomorrow. She said we have to have things in process and allocated by 2024 and then all spent by 2026. Matt asked about future meetings, if she anticipated having monthly or bi-monthly meetings. Brenda said yes and that by summer we should have some idea of allocations. She said we have around \$350,000.00 of requests that we can do, and we can start writing checks. She said the money is still in the bank and none has gone out yet. Matt asked if the town has \$396,000.00 in there and Brenda said around that as she couldn't find the sheet that was listed on. Matt asked if the meetings will be on the town website and John said yes and they have to be warned around town. Brenda said a lot will depend on Town Meeting Day.

Mark Laroche from Cold Hollow Catering asked Brenda if he qualified as a small business. Brenda said the grant is designed for anybody who has sustained a loss due to Covid, whether a small business or an individual. She said so far nobody has come in for a computer for their kids due to the fact that they had to stay home and distance learn and lacked a computer, but that is eligible. Also, for extraordinary medical expenses due to Covid. Mark said that he lost 18 months of work. Brenda said that qualifies just as J&A auto would qualify if they had lost funds. She said that some windows for employees have passed but you are self-employed and you contract work. Mark said that he qualified for zero covid money because he doesn't have any employees. He said they hung me out to dry. Brenda said to draw up and estimate of what you were not able to do and the business you can do and compare and contrast it. Present it in writing with good record keeping and tax records, etc. to substantiate what you have lost.

Bill Irwin spoke in favor of the Fire Dept emergency medical services. He said if you look over this room and any town gathering, we are dealing with an aging population and we're going to need more medical services as time passes. As a member of the Health Dept, that manages everyone's medical service for Vermont, we are very lucky to have the dedicated professionals like Ginger, Matt and Robert Willey, who go to all areas in the night to help the sick and injured and those in their last days. Bill said that there are a lot of towns across Vermont with difficulties to pull together money to keep any medical services going period. We are very lucky in this town to have a well-managed emergency service and fire service because of the way that we do it here in town. I've very lucky to work for the Fire Dept and Emergency service and see just how concerned they are about doing the right thing and any money they have is spent for the best things. Bill said that I know I'm inside that dept, but I get a look at a bigger portion of the state, and I ask those managing the ARPA funds to consider the investment to the Fire Dept and medical services here, which would be extremely valuable and extremely wise.

Brenda asked if there were any more proposals and there were none spoken. She said let's do this again at the end of April, if I can, and any people who

want to be on the citizen review committee, let her know. She said she would love to have a handful of people to share the responsibility, and maybe help tweak some proposals to make them work and get more info if needed.

Alice asked when the termination date is when the money will be divided and accounted. Brenda said when all the money is gone. She said nothing is carved in stone; it will be rolling disbursements as we spend down.

Brenda said there are other funds becoming available for infrastructure. She said we don't have a sewer system, but we do have a water system and we need broadband. Someone asked what the town, itself, was looking to the ARPA funds for. John said they are requesting some funds toward the grader. Our old grader is 35 years old, and it was getting harder to source parts to fix it. He said the used grader that we purchased is a 2012 in good condition, because new was way too expensive. The other equipment that we'd like to look into is getting a mower to mow the roadsides ourselves. We paid quite a bit of money last year to outsource it and some people weren't happy with it.

He said the Town Clerk portion of it is a request for the electronic recording of the Land records. We have no copies of any of the records and if somehow, we ended up losing those then we don't have any records. John said there is a book restoration fund, but this request is for the hours to scan the thousands of pages of records into the system. Tami said that the book restoration fund has money available, and it has purchased the module and the support. She said we haven't started scanning yet, but we put the module on a computer. Our hope is that we can keep the book restoration fund to pay the operation costs of the Land records module and tech support, and if we ever hook up to the portal, we are not hooking up to the portal at present, but it would be nice to have that money to pay those operational expenses. This fund is not funded by the town, it comes from a portion of the clerk's fees, and it would be nice if it all could be supported by the money that's not coming from the town and raise the budget for taxes. Tami said this scanning is a temporary thing so it would be a shame to drain that fund and she pointed out that digitalizing records was one of the major reasons that ARPA was given because during Covid there was a bit of a crisis for accessing land records for any purpose at all, especially for small towns. Tami said that even if we never attach to the portal, if someone alters a deed in a book, we would have a back-up scan to show that on this date, this is the way the deed looked, and have some evidence that the deed has been tampered with. Without that copy, we would have no evidence that anything was changed. Without that we have nothing. Linda said that she was concerned that they can access it remotely and change it.

John said that when someone comes to do research, instead of handling the physical hard copy of the book, researchers will search on the laptop in the office, print a copy of the deed from there and can eventually pay electronically. Tami said that some of those books take a beating with our researchers. They have to be taken apart every time someone needs a copy. She said the other day it took 3 of us to get a book back together. Tami said that at this point these backups are not leaving the office. Without attaching to the portal, they

can't be accessed remotely. Brenda said security is important, but we still need to conduct business. She said all the records that come in in the future will be scanned in and entered and at the same time, they will be working backward in time to archive everything. We'll have a new process in place. Linda asked if any social security numbers are getting out. Tami said there are no social security numbers on deeds. Linda asked about transfers. Tami said not too many ask about transfers. She said if an attorney comes in for research, that they probably already have their client's social security.

John said that NEMRC has been doing this for multiple towns since 2014, and the only thing that is going anywhere is a backup copy or snapshot copy that will be stored onto a NEMRC backup which is not live to anybody. John said that we all know that anything electronic isn't totally safe. He said your phones, computers, your iPads. He said they find ways to be in. He said the only thing we can do is to try to stop them at every turn. Tami said, that even hard copies are hard to keep safe. Linda said that we can't take security for granted. John said that he agrees completely.

Brenda said that the need for money is more pressing for some than for others. Alice Foote said that the Historical Society's claim falls behind the Fire Dept in that aspect. The need their money immediately. She said they are a great crew. Linda said that when we do have a citizen review committee, we would like to take them over to the Historical Society building to show them what was done. Brenda said we would meet at the end of April and get the minutes out to the people. She said we'd make a log of what we've done so far to stay transparent and above board for everybody.

Brenda said to conclude, someone will do this again at the end of April. Hopefully we will have constituted a group to review these and recommend them on to the Select Board. Brenda said that she would like to start writing checks in June or July, once we get approval, then we can begin. Brenda thanked all those attending for coming and for their input.

The meeting ended at 6:50pm.
Meeting minutes recorded by Tami Brennan.