

TOWN OF WALLINGFORD, CONNECTICUT
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON ARPA
REMOTE ONLY
WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY 16, 2022

6:30 P.M. – 9:00 P.M

RECORD OF VOTES & MINUTES

The Special Meeting of February 16, 2022, was called to order at 6:30 p.m. There was a moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance was said. Councilors in attendance were Autumn Allinson, Thomas Laffin, Christina Tata, Vincent Testa, and Jason Zandri. Tim Ryan, Economic Development Specialist was also present.

Discussion and possible action regarding the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for the Town of Wallingford.

Councilor Zandri would like to focus on wide impacting projects across town such as the Cheshire Park. He stated he thinks we could make the Community Pool palatable and to look at things anyone could use. He went on to say that we have WCI, EDC, SCOW, United Way, and CT Food Bank and that they have a good pulse on businesses and they know where there is need.

Councilor Allinson wanted to echo some of what Councilor Zandri said and added that we have a responsibility to make sure non-profits are accounted for. She stated she is hesitant to spend money on pool/town activities as the pool operates on a membership fee. Councilor Allinson stated renovation of pool is not something that is going to be fair to everyone involved unless fees were waived.

Councilor Testa stated that his hope for objectives tonight is to establish what our charge is, both mission and authority. He also stated that he has been saying this from the beginning and asked what our role is as a council. He went on to say that tonight cannot be a priority hearing and we can't be talking about the pool – that we need to decide if the pool should be talked about. Councilor Testa questioned if any of this money should be used for a capital project.

Councilor Tatta stated that it is her understanding this is the Town Council's decision. She stated she has been talking to people and non-profits in town and has a list of projects and that she is leaning toward capital projects. Councilor Tatta remarked that she would like something that will have a big impact on the town and that the pool would be a great use of this money and it would be free. Councilor Tatta also stated that even if taxpayers didn't use the pool, they didn't have to pay for it. She suggested giving non-profits a chunk of money and let them do what they want with it. She mentioned block grants, skate parks, improved trails at Tyler Mill and noted that Parks & Rec could be brought into that. She also mentioned traffic light issues and Wi-Fi in the center of town.

Councilor Laffin stated he agrees with Councilor Testa and start with the bigger picture and that it is clearly on us to decide. He stated his priorities are not capital projects-but businesses, non-profits and discussion on individuals. He stated we cannot turn a blind eye on businesses and they are counting on it. Councilor Laffin remarked that non-profits could assist in handing out funds to those who need this money and they may be better equipped to do this. He recommends we start with what the consultant has already done and that it is an opportunity for public to tell us what is needed in a formal way.

Councilor Allinson agrees that committee needs to come up with our charge and make sure this is socially responsible.

Councilor Tatta stated an application is not a survey and is not information gathering. She also stated that she has concerns with Spanish speaking people and how we are going to make people aware of this.

Councilor Laffin mentioned he may have said “survey” but meant “application”.

Councilor Testa stated committee needs to decide how to distribute funds philosophically and decide what priorities are.

Councilor Laffin made suggestion of 20% to community – committee, 20% to business – EDC, and 20% to public agencies – United Way, SCOW, etc., and let them make decision. He stated it’s not real difficult thing to do and committee should make the big board decisions and then allocate.

Mr. Ryan stated he would like to go back to onset of ARPA program. It was introduced as relief for small businesses, non-profits, and households. He feels it’s beginning to get grayed by municipal projects. He also stated he has spoken to WCI and many businesses who are anticipating this program. He asked the committee to prioritize small businesses with 25 or less employees and to eliminate chain restaurants. He has no doubt many applications will be received from Center Street. Mr. Ryan remarked that we’re here to help businesses who have not flourished and implored committee to allow EDC to work with them.

Councilor Laffin remarked that non-profits could address how money should be used and that businesses, non-profits, households and pool project could get portion of money. Councilor Laffin invited public to notify him in chat bar if they wanted to speak.

Jason Michael, 81 Meadow Street, stated he is the owner of three businesses in town and they were able to weather the storm. He feels capital project do effect everyone and improve value of our town. He questioned how percentage of funds would be divided if number of applicants is unknown.

Councilor Laffin stated application process is a way to start.

Maria Harlow, 6 Holly Lane, stated that she feels we are getting somewhere and that Tim Ryan hit the nail on the head. She feels we should invest in the best possible way and need to be

strategic to help lift our community. She stated that Town Council ultimately is responsible to approve here and would like opportunity to discuss this more. She agrees priorities should be small business, non-profits, and households. She remarked that application needs improvement.

Debbie Gross, Long Hill Road, commented on the best and quickest way to process applications. She stated everyone in town was impacted in some way, shape, or form by COVID.

Mike Savinelli – stated this is a great discussion and that there are good ideas out there. He stated we are at the 6 year anniversary of getting nothing done with the pool and he does not see the Mayor making changes on his position with regard to the pool. He feels some of the money should be used for the pool.

Liz Davis, 31 Audette Drive, commented that setting parameters will reduce applications and larger applicants can be weeded out. She feels some downtown businesses won't apply-that they got through COVID and want others to benefit from money. Ms. Davis stated she is for capital projects and wants to make sure businesses and people are addressed.

Richard Krombel, 38 North Elm St, remarked to the committee that the spotlight is on them and they need to define what their charge is and understand what they are able to do and what they are not able to do. He inquired about a website being established and feels everything should be documented and above board.

Joseph Mirra , EDC, echoed what Tim Ryan said. He feels survey is senseless and a waste of time. He stated helping small business will have a trickle-down effect. He feels the process needs tweaking and leaders have to lead.

Adriana Rodriguez, Executive Director of SCOW, read the following statement:

“If we come together collectively, we can continue the already ongoing efforts that are happening in Wallingford. There are many non-profit organizations that have the expertise and experience with emergency situations such as COVID. The non-profits provide the direct services, advocacy, and cross-collaboration. We do it better when we work together and everything that we do is with purpose.

At SCOW, our mission is to respond to the needs of the community by assisting. We can share our process of what we have done. We have distributed partial financial assistance with rent, utilities, medical, and so on. Not only to the Hispanic community, but to everyone who walks through our doors and is in need. We have successfully coordinated 27 vaccination clinics, food drives, distributions of COVID-19 test kits and PPE to 2,200 people. This was made possible by working together with Youth & Social Services, Wallingford Health Department, United Way, Masters Manna, Ulbrich Boys and Girls Club, Wallingford Center Inc., Family YMCA, Hubcap, the Wallingford Public Schools, Wallingford Public Library, and many more. At each event, we provide wrap-around services to connect individuals with community resources in English and Spanish. I am more than glad to share what we have learned over the past two years.”

Bob Gross, Long Hill Road, stated he agrees with Mr. Michael, Councilor Tatta, and Mr. Savinelli. He stated groups such as United Way and Masters Manna are able to step in and take care of needs of people of Wallingford. He suggested they request one million right off the bat and have them document how they spend money and come back if there is a need. Mr. Gross also commented that most other towns are doing big projects because those projects help the most people. He urged the committee to get money out there now.

Mr. Ryan cautioned comparison to other towns and that the devil is in the details and we should compare apples to apples. He stated we have the ability to put notifications in with electric bills. Mr. Ryan also commented that these are unprecedented times, that government shut businesses down, necessarily so, now government needs to make businesses whole by providing this money. If money is left over, we can go to community projects.

Councilor Laffin agrees with Mr. Ryan.

Councilor Zandri stated not to misconstrue comments as rebuttal, treat as add on, and that we need to do something yesterday. He stated some businesses didn't need to be close, such as appointment like businesses. Councilor Zandri stated that the Town was impacted by COVID giving the example of Wallace parking lot and 30% increase in supplies costs. He pointed out that if we help businesses with 150 employees, that's 150 employees that may benefit from raises and more hours and stated the rising tide helps all boats. He stated we may never get a chance like this again and we need to start the action and execute.

Councilor Testa stated that he appreciates what Mr. Michael said and many times number is arbitrary and he has seen it with school projects. He went on to say that if we start with what our role is we can say percentage wise how we want to allocate this money. He also stated that when we decide what our job is as representatives of community with fiduciary responsibility we can distribute funds according to this formula. He understands Mr. Ryan's point on how this originated and that there was a lot of other money available to businesses. Councilor Testa stated that we can impact potentially every area of our community.

Councilor Allinson state that no one has said it's hard to make it work and that this is us doing what we are charged to do. She stated we are doing the hard thing right now and that we are not allowed to discuss this privately.

Councilor Laffin stated that we should move forward with the application, allot money now and expedite the application process to figure out what priorities need to be. He feels it's better to get an idea how over or underwhelming this is and suggested going to Mr. Reagan to tighten up proposal and coordinate application process with electric bill.

Councilor Tatta stated she is not in favor of rolling out application process and doesn't know why we would encourage people to apply for money they may never get.

Councilor Laffin stated an application is not guaranteed, it's saying you are qualified to receive this money.

Councilor Tatta stated it's a huge problem for her and asked who is choosing who gets money.

Councilor Laffin stated that we will determine structure and that non-profits apply for grant money and give it out all the time and that will not be determined tonight.

Councilor Testa stated he would like to see us decide what we are doing as a committee and decide what our charge is and establish priorities tonight.

Councilor Laffin suggested sending out applications to determine priorities and how to allocate percentages.

Councilor Tatta suggested 50% to projects and 50% to go somewhere else.

Councilor Testa stated he thinks we're all trying to get to same point and are going to establish spending priorities and are getting closer to agreeing.

Councilor Tatta is concerned about kicking can down the road and that it doesn't seem that hard for other towns.

Councilor Allinson questioned how to make sure businesses and individuals are not double dipping. She stated she likes the idea of WCI, SCOW, EDC, etc., of tracking process.

Councilor Laffin entertained the following motion:

MOTION WAS MADE TO ESTABLISH THE CHARGE OF THIS SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF WALLINGFORD TO DETERMINE THE SPENDING PRIORITIES OF THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) FUNDS.

MADE BY: ZANDRI

SECONDED BY: TESTA

ROLL CALL VOTE:

ALLINSON: YES

LAFFIN: YES

TATTA: YES

TESTA: YES

ZANDRI: YES

MOTION: PASSED

Councilor Tatta inquired what happens if Town Council doesn't agree with this sub-committee and stated she is concerned with time line.

Councilor Zandri remarked that is why there are five of us.

Councilor Laffin is confident that sub-committee will persevere.

Councilor Allinson wants to get feedback from other members of Town Council.

Councilor Laffin suggested putting together a report for other councilors.

Councilor Testa stated he is optimistic about what was accomplished tonight.

Councilor Tatta suggested Town Council review minutes of meeting.

Councilor Testa stated that Maria Harlow, Liz Davis, and Tim Ryan attended meeting and were heard.

Councilor Laffin stated he would like to see applications and not power point presentations. He would like to determine who is going to review applications and what percent needs to go where.

Councilor Allinson stated she would like to establish what the application process will look like and stated all things should be taken into consideration.

Councilor Zandri stated he was quickly going over PPP Program list. He disagrees with blanket statement, and application process should be wide open and committee should whittle it out.

Councilor Laffin stated one question should be, "Did you receive PPP funds?"

Councilor Testa stated that we need to establish that we have authority to do that and will our decision be honored.

Councilor Tatta stated she does not want to be involved in application process and is not in favor of this at this point. She stated she is more in favor of block grants to WCI, EDC, etc. and let them make their own applications.

Councilor Laffin stated that is benefit of getting applications – to review them. He stated he could be in favor of identifying 5 or 6 non-profits along with Y&SS.

Councilor Allinson stated there needs to be an application no matter what we decide to do and that committee needs to vet it and the next step should be to review the application.

Councilor Laffin stated process may be tiered and the goal is to meet charge and determine how much money is spent where.

Councilor Allinson stated no one could get anything without applying for it.

Councilor Tatta stated she does not feel applications have to be looked at to get to final goal and that a huge segment of population, which is those that want capital projects, will be cut out. Councilor Tatta stated there is no way to gage that desire through application.

Councilor Laffin asked what could be a solution to get around that.

Councilor Tatta stated that we were elected for that reason- to make decisions for the town by being elected officials.

Councilor Testa stated looking at applications can gage need with understanding that we as Town Council decide what needs of community are.

Councilor Laffin stated he was comfortable that the committee will determine what capital projects are. He stated the committee will ask for applications as they stand, review and change them and decide who is best suited to give them out.

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah McKiernan
Deborah McKiernan, Town Clerk

2/8/2022
Date

Thomas Laffin
Thomas Laffin, Vice Chairman

2/8/2022
Date

RECEIVED FOR RECORD 2-18-22
AT 4:00 p.m. AND RECEIVED BY
Deborah McKiernan TOWN CLERK

In accordance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act- Individuals in need of auxiliary aids for effective communication in programs and services of the Town of Wallingford are invited to make their needs and preferences known to the ADA Compliance Coordinator at 203-294-2070 five days prior to meeting date.