

**TOWN OF WALLINGFORD
WALLINGFORD ARPA APPLICATION REVIEW COMMITTEE
129 Center Street (HUBCAP)
Wallingford, CT 06492**

**Wednesday, March 1, 2023
6:30 p.m.**

UNAPPROVED DRAFT RECORD OF VOTES AND MINUTES

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. Those in attendance rose and recited the Pledge of Allegiance. Members in attendance were Carl Bonamico, Mike Brodinsky, Craig Fishbein, Robert Fritz, Robert Gross, Jacqueline McNamee, Christopher Regan, Jesse Reynolds, and Amy Walsh.

Recusals: Craig Fishbein for the Vogue Nail Salon application

Members of the public: applicant Tap & Vine

Discussion and possible action on the following grant applications.

Mr. Brodinsky reviewed the scoring process and reminded the committee that businesses have to get a total average score of 70 or above to get a favorable recommendation.

Tap and Vine

Ms. Walsh outlined the application. They are requesting \$24,736 for patio repairs and outdoor furniture replacement. They had a slight loss in 2019, a large loss in 2020, and a middling loss in 2021. They did receive PPP and loan assistance. They are not back to the pre-pandemic level yet. The project will help them in their long-term recovery. They discussed the financial adversity they are experiencing. The budget is appropriate and supported by the documentation.

Committee comments on this application included:

- Thorough application
- Forthcoming with all money received
- Impacted by COVID
- The purchases will make the place better
- Backup/documentation is good
- Came back a little in 2021, but not recovered
- Certainly impacted
- Keep in mind the inflation effect
- Fits the mission of this grant program

Score sheets were handed in.

Total Scores:

Brodinsky:	96	Gross:	80
Bonamico:	85	McNamee:	90
Fishbein:	80	Regan:	85

Fritz: 100 Reynolds: 90
Glidden: absent Walsh: 93
The average score is 88.78

Motion, based on the average score, to recommend further favorable action in the matter of Tap and Vine in the amount of \$24,736.

Made by: Mr. Brodinsky
Seconded by: Mr. Fishbein

Vote:

Brodinsky:	Yes	Gross:	Yes
Bonamico:	Yes	McNamee:	Yes
Fishbein:	Yes	Regan:	Yes
Fritz:	Yes	Reynolds:	Yes
Glidden:	absent	Walsh:	Yes

Ayes: 9
Nays: 0
Recusals: 0
Absent: 1
Motion carries

Clear Solutions Sewer and Drain

Mr. Regan outlined the application. The company is 12 years old and provided an absolutely needed service, particularly during COVID. They had a loss in 2019 and a decrease in business in 2020. In 2021 they were unable to get back to the 2019 level. COVID contributed to their hardship. They provide an essential service. The upgrades will allow them to better serve customers. The project is appropriate. They did not provide detailed quotes. The timeline is reasonable.

Committee comments on this application included:

- Would have liked more detail.
- This fits the intent of ARPA
- Demonstrated the impact
- Hard to tell the degree to which the project will assist in their recovery
- They made money in the middle of the pandemic than in 2021 were back to a slight negative.
- Small business, close to the edge.
- Flaws in the application
- The owner has two applications
- Appropriate use for these funds
- The money will allow them to grow
- Not sure how COVID impacted when their revenue went up in 2020
- The funds will allow them to purchase equipment that will expand their services.

Score sheets were handed in.

Total Scores:

Brodinsky:	79	Gross:	75
Bonamico:	80	McNamee:	80
Fishbein:	30	Regan:	78
Fritz:	70	Reynolds:	70
Glidden:	absent	Walsh:	70

The average score is 70.22

Motion, based on the average score, to recommend further favorable action in the matter of Clear Solutions Sewer and Drain in the amount of \$24,000.

**Made by: Mr. Brodinsky
Seconded by: Mr. Reynolds**

Vote:

Brodinsky:	Yes	Gross:	Yes
Bonamico:	Yes	McNamee:	Yes
Fishbein:	Yes	Regan:	Yes
Fritz:	Yes	Reynolds:	Yes
Glidden:	absent	Walsh:	Yes

**Ayes: 9
Nays: 0
Recusals: 0
Absent: 1
Motion carries**

Eye and Vision Clinic

Mr. Brodinsky asked for confirmation that the application is missing tax returns and thus based on our policy is incomplete.

Motion to recommend no further favorable action in the matter of Eye and Vision Clinic because it is incomplete (no tax returns or CPA issued Profit and Loss statement).

**Made by: Mr. Brodinsky
Seconded by: Mr. Fishbein**

Vote:

Brodinsky:	Yes	Gross:	Yes
Bonamico:	Yes	McNamee:	Yes
Fishbein:	Yes	Regan:	Yes
Fritz:	Yes	Reynolds:	absent
Glidden:	absent	Walsh:	Yes

Ayes: 8

Nays: 0
Recusals: 0
Absent: 2
Motion carries

John Rozz Sound Spectrum

Mr. Reynolds outlined the application. This is an event-based company that has been around for a long time. He is very active in the community. There is a lot of supporting documentation. This is not a short-term fix. Financials show that there was a profit in 2019, and a loss in 2020 and they came back a little in 2021.

Committee comments on this application included:

- Kind of business affected by COVID
- The applicant obviously spent a lot of time on the application
- A lot of back-up material
- Thorough application.

No second-round comments were made. Score sheets were handed in.

Total Scores:

Brodinsky:	92	Gross:	80
Bonamico:	92	McNamee:	90
Fishbein:	75	Regan:	90
Fritz:	90	Reynolds:	90
Glidden:	absent	Walsh:	97

The average score is **88.44**

Motion, based on the average score, to recommend further favorable action in the matter of the John Rozz Sound Spectrum in the amount of \$25,000.

Made by: Mr. Brodinsky
Seconded by: Mr. Fishbein

Vote:

Brodinsky:	Yes	Gross:	Yes
Bonamico:	Yes	McNamee:	Yes
Fishbein:	Yes	Regan:	Yes
Fritz:	Yes	Reynolds:	Yes
Glidden:	absent	Walsh:	Yes

Ayes: 9
Nays: 0
Recusals: 0
Absent: 1
Motion carries

ZR Coop Services, LLC

Ms. Walsh outlined the application. This company provides painting restoration to medical facilities and nursing homes. They were unable to work in their client’s facilities during COVID. They will use the funds to construct a dry storage facility. They provided tax returns. Financials show a profit in 2019; more in 2020 and 2021 is below pre-pandemic. They did not detail their financial adversity. Their request is a range of \$30,000 to \$35,000, but the tracker indicates \$25,000. Ms. Walsh stated that she supports the \$25,000 amount.

Committee comments on this application included:

- Didn’t show they suffered that much
- No tax returns, just Schedule C’s
- The proposed purchase doesn’t appear to be appropriate
- Schedule C is not the complete return but has most of the information.
- Wage expenses and insurance down in 2020, which increases the net.
- The application is well written
- Went from 8 employees to 6
- Not sure how the project will grow the business
- Would have liked more detail on what they will spend the money on.
- Too many grey areas.
- Might have been paid in 2020 for work done in 2019
- Not sure what the money is for

Mr. Brodinsky responded to a question about vagueness in the use of funds. The Law Department would probably present a contract that would require specifics

After a second round of comments, score sheets were handed in.

Total Scores:

Brodinsky:	79	Gross:	70
Bonamico:	71	McNamee:	75
Fishbein:	40	Regan:	65
Fritz:	70	Reynolds:	70
Glidden:	absent	Walsh:	32

The average score is 63.56

Motion, based on the average score, to recommend no further favorable action in the matter of ZR Coop Services, LLC.

Made by: Mr. Brodinsky

Seconded by: Mr. Regan

Vote:

Brodinsky:	Yes	Gross:	Yes
Bonamico:	Yes	McNamee:	Yes
Fishbein:	Yes	Regan:	Yes
Fritz:	Yes	Reynolds:	Yes
Glidden:	absent	Walsh:	Yes

Ayes: 9
Nays: 0
Recusals: 0
Absent: 1
Motion carries

Vogue Nail Salon, LLC

Mr. Fishbein recused himself.

Ms. McNamee outlined the application. They have been in business for 18 years. The financials show that they were severely impacted by the pandemic. They received PPP and EIDL which they used for their recovery. They can't use this grant for back pay for rent and utilities.

Committee comments on this application included:

- Impacted and suffered a loss
- Long-term sustainable improvement
- Use of funds and budget not appropriate
- The rest of the application scores well
- Haven't come back to pre-pandemic levels
- The proposed use is a problem
- The use listed is a temporary fix.
- Paying down debt is specifically not permitted.

No second-round comments were made. Score sheets were handed in.

Total Scores:

Brodinsky:	58	Gross:	70
Bonamico:	73	McNamee:	75
Fishbein:	Recused	Regan:	65
Fritz:	80	Reynolds:	60
Glidden:	absent	Walsh:	40

The average score is 65.13

Motion, based on the average score, to recommend no further favorable action in the matter of Vogue Nail Salon, LLC.

Made by: Mr. Brodinsky
Seconded by: Mr. Bonamico

Vote:

Brodinsky:	Yes	Gross:	Yes
Bonamico:	Yes	McNamee:	Yes
Fishbein:	Recused	Regan:	Yes
Fritz:	Yes	Reynolds:	Yes
Glidden:	absent	Walsh:	Yes

Ayes: 8
Nays: 0
Recusals: 1
Absent: 1
Motion carries

Salon Le Rae

Mr. Regan outlined the application. They are an important staple in the community. The application is well documented. He noted that he struggled with the amount of money they are requesting. They were forced to move and are currently in a rental property. They want to use it to repair the hot water heater, but who owns it? They want to have a three-year education plan, but the project is supposed to be completed in 12 months. They included a raise for the receptionist and incentives for hair stylists. The business was clearly impacted by the pandemic. Looking at the financials, they turned the business around in 2021. He suggested giving them half the amount they are asking for.

Committee comments on this application included:

- Would consider passing it for less money
- Hard time with the use of the funds
- Employment has gone up.
- Seems to have recovered from the pandemic
- No clear plan for spending the money
- Didn't see the degree of financial adversity that they are currently experiencing
- Definitely a steep decline in 2020
- A great strategy to recover
- Lacks details and correlation
- Investing in the business

No second-round comments were made. Score sheets were handed in.

Total Scores:

Brodinsky:	59	Gross:	50
Bonamico:	65	McNamee:	75
Fishbein:	45	Regan:	60
Fritz:	80	Reynolds:	60
Glidden:	absent	Walsh:	50

The average score is 60.44

The question was posed if the request was reduced would any committee members support the application? There not being sufficient interest, a motion was made.

Motion, based on the average score, to recommend no further favorable action in the matter of the Salon Le Rae.

Made by: Mr. Brodinsky
Seconded by: Ms. Walsh

Vote:

Brodinsky:	Yes	Gross:	Yes
Bonamico:	Yes	McNamee:	Yes
Fishbein:	Yes	Regan:	Yes
Fritz:	Yes	Reynolds:	Yes
Glidden:	absent	Walsh:	Yes

Ayes: 9

Nays: 0

Recusals: 0

Absent: 1

Motion carries

In view of the previous application, Mr. Brodinsky reviewed a procedure to reduce a grant request. If there is a piece of the request that can be removed, members can bring it up when they discuss the application. Then others can react and indicate if it would affect their scoring, if a severable portion of the request was excised. For example "I don't like a specific use, if we take it out, would the application get a better score?" If there is enough support after discussion, a motion can be made to remove the severable portion before the application is scored.

Laskara Restaurant

Mr. Brodinsky asked for confirmation that the application does not have tax returns so it is incomplete. Others confirmed

Motion to recommend no further action in the matter of the Laskara Restaurant due to the application being incomplete (no tax returns or CPA issued Profit and Loss statements).

Made by: Mr. Brodinsky

Seconded by: Mr. Fishbein

Vote:

Brodinsky:	Yes	Gross:	Yes
Bonamico:	Yes	McNamee:	Yes
Fishbein:	Yes	Regan:	Yes
Fritz:	Yes	Reynolds:	Yes
Glidden:	absent	Walsh:	Yes

Ayes: 9

Nays: 0

Recusals: 0

Absent: 1

Motion carries

Updates and Procedural matters: Discussion and possible action

Discussion about who wants to write the “Testa Report”

Motion to stop reviewing any more non-profit applications until the Council decides what to do with them.

Made by: Mr. Gross

Seconded by: Mr. Brodinsky for discussion purposes.

Mr. Brodinsky reported that he received a memo from Councilor Testa asking for a report on our rationale for the applications that were not recommended for funding. He spoke briefly with Councilor Testa and explained that there is no one rationale. The applications were scored by 10 people. When asked why Councilor Testa wanted it, he replied that it is in case the Council wants to overrule the Committee.

Mr. Brodinsky stated that in his opinion the report would be the instrument of our own demise. He asked if anyone wanted to write the report. He noted that our rationales are in the minutes and the recordings of the meeting. He stated that he will not be writing the report as it is not in the best interests of the Committee. He sees it as bullying and political interference. If anyone else wants to write the report, he is willing to talk about it. He suggested talking about the Councilor Testa memo first before taking up Mr. Gross's motion as they raise related issues.

Mr. Reynolds stated that committee members turned in scoring sheets and the conversations were recorded. That is the report. He doesn't see the need for another report on only the ones we didn't approve. We have been respectful of the applicants and the process.

Ms. Walsh stated that there is enough recorded. She suggested that the Council is not clear on our procedure. She proposed presenting our procedure to the Council.

Mr. Gross noted that the Council provided the scoring sheets and that they can attend our meetings. He suggested leaving everything status quo.

Mr. Fishbein commended Mr. Brodinsky for all the work that he has done. This is a great homogenous group with the intent to do good for the town. He stated that he was offended by the item on last night's Council agenda. It opens the door to challenge any application. If non-profit applications are reviewable, then next are the business applications. This is all about politics and personal relationships. We need to know from the Council if our recommendations have validity or not. He supports not sending the requested report.

Mr. Brodinsky stated that one of the commendable ideals of forming this review committee was to separate the political considerations from the merits of the applications and help insulate the Mayor and Council from pressure politics. We have agreed-upon criteria that were given to us by the Council. Mr. Brodinsky gave more background. At our February 21st meeting three non-profits were not recommended. One was the Grange, which had representatives in the room. Immediately following our decision, one individual communicated with Councilor Jason Zandri. Jason promised to put an item on the Council agenda to reverse the committee's decision. It has come to light that Councilor Zandri was an officer of the Grange at that time. Mr. Brodinsky went back via email to Councilor Zandri and he confirmed that he was an officer but resigned on February 27th. He put his own organization before the

Council, on its agenda, so his organization could benefit. Councilor Zandri stated that he felt he could participate in the discussion of the Grange application, but would not vote. Mr. Brodinsky sent an email to Janis Small and Vincent Cervoni stating that Mr. Zandri's motion to over-ride the committee's decisions should not go forward due to ethics. The item was taken off last night's agenda. He expects it to reappear soon. Mr. Brodinsky believes this is because the Council members can win votes from members and supporters of the non-profits. The code of ethics breach won't matter. He noted that Councilor Zandri's memo with his justification is factually wrong and misinterprets. This makes the committee look bad. He gave examples of the misinformation that is being promoted. 990's, for example. Councilor Zandri implies that if the Consultant passed it on to us that we are bound by that. Mr. Brodinsky noted that the role of the consultant is vague. The consultant looks to see if the documentation exists and if so checks it off. They don't study the financials to see what they mean. Councilor Zandri suggests that we had information that we did not have, specifically the documentation supporting the request and CPA issued financial statements. The consultant is also looking at the applications based on the Federal ARPA criteria. The local criteria are stricter.

Mr. Bonamico stated that we have a process and provide full transparency. We are implementing an objective process. This has been politicized and challenges our credibility. He doesn't support writing a report as it is against what we were tasked to do.

Ms. McNamee stated that the minutes and documentation are already there. There is no need for an additional report. When we state that we recommend an application, we are deferring our vote to the Council. So they can overrule us if they want. Is the way they are doing it an abuse of power? What is our purpose? The Town Council approved an increase in the total amount to be awarded to non-profits. So why not just give them what they are asking for?

Mr. Fritz stated that we can't control the actions of others. This committee was formed out of political dysfunction. We have behaved properly. The way it was set up is due to the incompetence of some council members. The review criteria should have been uniform. We owe no apologies. He stated that we should continue with our task. We should remain professional and objective. We have a task to do. He stated that he is proud of what we are doing.

Mr. Regan questioned why we are even here. What is the end state if our work can be turned over at the whim of a handful of Councilors? If we are only suggesting approval, then the Council should vote on the applications. They gave us the evaluation criteria scorecard. They can take it and do it themselves. He supports a motion to reaffirm the vote on the Grange application and rebut the statements. That can be read into the minutes at the next Town Council meeting. We are making sure that the due diligence is done with Town funds. There are inconsistencies from the Consultant. If Council wants to approve all the non-profit applications, they can go ahead and do so. He noted that the requests all came in lower than expected for both the business and non-profit applications. There is no consideration of what this means to the Legal Department that has to write the contracts.

Mr. Reynolds suggested a response to Councilor Testa that all the information is there. Regarding the issue raised by Councilor Zandri, these are recommendations, and the Council can do an appeal process. Mr. Reynolds's preference is that it be done at the end, not in the middle of the process. It is not right to undo the work of the committee on the night that we do it. Will they overturn every time we turn one down? If so, why are we here? He stated that we should not score any more applications until they decide what they want to do. This is a good process. There are valid points as to why that application was not funded.

Mr. Fishbein disagreed with the need to present our process to the Council. They can review the minutes. There is talk of changing the way we score applications, which would be micro-managing. He noted that any councilor can be here, but they chose not to be. One reason for the review committee was that the original calculation indicated that the amount of requests would be more than what was set aside. The Council didn't want that to impede granting the funds. So they put money aside for businesses and non-profits. He noted that we approve based on 7 votes while the Council is based on 5. He has respect for what we are doing. He stated that we have to know if we are here just for show.

In response to a question, Mr. Brodinsky stated that if Councilor Zandri's motion had come to a vote, it would have passed. He stated that he was ready to explain our procedures and code of ethics and how he reports to applicants. He stated that once the Council starts overturning our decisions, it will keep going. He also noted that he will be out of town for the March 14th Council meeting. He considered an Op-Ed if we cannot present the committee's case.

Mr. Fishbein stated that if the item had remained on the agenda, he would have made a motion to disband the committee. He stated that he asked two Council members if they had listened to the recording of the meeting or looked at the applications and they had not. We have no control over the process by which we will be overruled.

Ms. Walsh stated that we need to explain why the application was not approved. They must not understand the criteria. It is not a perfect system. There will be a group that is denied. The Council can decide on an appeal process. She is in favor of reiterating our vote on the Grange.

Mr. Gross stated that he doesn't think we need to do a presentation to the Council. He supports not moving forward with non-profit applications.

Mr. Brodinsky asked if we know that they will reverse all our non-profit votes, do we want to continue.

Mr. Reynolds stated that our recommendations are not set in stone. We aren't the true arbiters. If at the end of the process, the Council said everyone can have the money, he will be disappointed. If the money is only given to those that complain, why go through the process?

Mr. Gross noted that we all take this seriously but don't have the support of the Council. He suggested that we continue to do business applications until the Council meeting where the item is discussed.

Mr. Brodinsky stated that he doesn't want to do any more non-profit applications if the council will routinely use political considerations to overturn the committee's decisions. Business applications are not as an immediate problem. Ideally, there should be a test vote by the Council on those three applications.

Mr. Fishbein stated that the item on the Council agenda creates a problem. He objects to that body reviewing those applications. If he puts anything on the agenda it will be to disband the Committee.

Mr. Brodinsky proposed some options. 1) pause on non-profit applications, 2) pause on all applications or 3) proceed as if nothing happened. This is why he took the non-profit applications off tonight's agenda. He is willing to call the non-profits to take them off the next meeting as well and focus on business applications. The public education piece has to be done.

Mr. Bonamico stated that he doesn't want to review more non-profit applications but we should continue to review business applications.

Ms. McNamee agreed.

Mr. Fritz agreed to hold on to non-profits and continue with business applications.

Mr. Regan stated that he preferred to hold off on both as it will happen eventually anyway.

Mr. Reynolds agreed with pausing on non-profits. He is willing to do business applications but prefers holding on reviewing all applications. He stated that he is disappointed that we can't continue the process to help people.

Ms. Walsh stated that the non-profits lobbied well to be included. Now politics are causing a pause and the money isn't getting out to those who need it. She agreed with pausing everything.

Mr. Gross agreed with pausing non-profits but sees the point of pausing both.

Mr. Fishbein agreed with pausing both. He noted that Council took a lot of heat for the delay in getting the program started. He asked Mr. Brodinsky to do the Op-Ed talking about the process, the politics, and the unethical conduct that got us to this place. We should not be blamed.

Mr. Brodinsky suggested meeting on the 7th to continue discussing this issue and not review any applications. He also suggested that Committee members go back to the Council member that appointed them. He noted that the Town has not acted on any of the applications we have recommended yet. One week won't make a difference.

Mr. Fritz stated that he is proud to be a part of this committee. His happy to put his name on the Op-Ed and thought the whole group should sign it. It should be focused on an update on what we are doing. He suggested trying to get into the magazine as well.

Mr. Brodinsky stated that he will draft something and share it. He confirmed that we will meet on March 7th but will not review applications. We will discuss where we are with this matter and circulate the Op-Ed.

The consensus was that no vote was needed on the open motion.

ADJOURN

Motion to adjourn at 9:05 pm

Made by: Mr. Regan

Seconded by: Mr. Fishbein

Respectfully submitted,
Cheryl-Ann Tubby
Recording Secretary