



*Office of the Town Manager*

## TOWN OF ACTON

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### MEMORANDUM

Date: September 27, 2021

To: Christine Russell, Finance Committee Chair

From: John S. Mangiaratti, Town Manager *JSM*

RE: Finance Committee Questions Regarding American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Investment Priorities

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Thank you for all of the thoughtful feedback related to the draft ARPA investment priorities. Please find below in red ink the responses to questions received from Finance Committee members related to the September 13, 2021 Town of Acton Draft Preliminary ARPA Investment Priorities which we discussed at the September 14, 2021 Finance Committee meeting. I have previously provided a list of how these priorities are reflected in Select Board goals and in the 2022-2031 Recommended Capital Improvement Plan. If you have any further questions please let me know. I look forward to continuing to discuss these priorities with the Finance Committee ahead of the October 18, 2021 Select Board meeting where the Board is scheduled to finalize the investment plan.

*(Questions from Finance Committee members are shown below in black ink, responses are shown in red ink)*

P2: Asa Parlin as Cultural Center -

- How much has the town spent on the Asa Parlin lot so far (i.e. purchase, remediation, etc)? *We received a \$175K CPA allocation from the 2019 Annual Town Meeting and a \$100k earmark in the 2020 State budget. After the selective demo and the design services incurred to date, we have \$102k remaining in the CPA amounts.*
- What alternative uses are there for this property? *The Select Board set as its top priority for this year to transform this property for a community/cultural center.*
- Why is this a ST-1 priority for the SB? *I believe several factors were involved with this prioritization:*
  - *The pandemic highlighted the need to have a facility to bring people together and there were several calls over the last year or so for more community space.*
  - *The project includes an outdoor meeting space which is in high demand since the pandemic started. Town Hall staff routinely convene outdoor meetings.*
  - *The building itself is located in the core of the municipal complex and has been both an eyesore and an ineffective use of municipal property.*
  - *The state legislature supported this project and earmarked \$100k towards the effort to develop a community center at this location.*

- The library has expressed a need for more programming space and this would support that need.
- What would the ongoing costs of operating a cultural center at the Asa Parlin House cost? Heating, cooling, mowing, shoveling, janitorial services when in use.
- When would these costs start? After construction.
- How many additional FTEs would be used to run it and any associated programs? It is anticipated that existing staff and volunteers would facilitate the programming and related needs for operating this facility.

P3: Telephone system upgrade - Is this captured in the school's CIP? This is a request of ABRSD seeking ARPA funding.

P6: Open Space set-aside –

Are these requests typically handled by CPA funding? Yes

- Why use ARPA funds for projects that CPA can fund? The Select Board set as a goal for this year “enhance funding for open space” as there are many competing interests and requests for a fixed amount of CPA funds.
- P7: Sustainability, EVs, solar arrays, etc - What does \$200,000 actually purchase here? Funding allocated to sustainability programs would support conversion of fleet to electric and installing the necessary infrastructure. This funding would be used to purchase EV to replace police cruisers and transportation vans. Such an investment could have an immediate payback as a reduction in gasoline expense. Exploration of solar array(s) to be used on Town owned lands could yield similar savings in electric costs support our commitment to reaching net zero by 2030.

P9: Sewer for AHA/Kennedy Property -

- Where is this sewer request currently captured in our capital plans / town planning / housing authority planning? In March of 2021, the town was awarded a Housing Choice Grant in the amount of \$165,500 for feasibility and design services related to connecting the municipal sewer to the AHA property. The feasibility study report will be delivered by the end of September. It is expected that the cost estimate will be \$1.5M.
- Is the AHA interested in having a sewer? My understanding is that the AHA wants to build a successful senior housing development and will consider any and all available avenues to achieve this goal. Since sewer is not yet available the project is currently proposed as having a septic system.
- What difference in annual costs would they incur over having a sewer? There would not be a betterment for the sewer installation. The annual O&M costs would vary depending on utilization and sewer rates.
- What additional costs would the town incur by implementing this? Most if not all of the additional costs will be covered by the O&M fees assessed.

P12: Water main in Kelley’s Corner –

Where is this request currently captured in town planning? **It is not.** My understanding is that Acton Water District users would normally pay for expenses like this. Is this the town paying for part of it to offset that expense to AWD water users? **This was a request from the Water District seeking ARPA funding to offset the total water main replacement costs that will be borne by the Water District. The Acton Water District has withdrawn this request and has submitted an alternate request seeking \$2M towards PFAS mitigation measures for its North Acton Treatment Plant.**

P13: Broadband and Utilities on Quarry Rd - How many residences or other facilities would benefit from this expansion? **This project would provide cabling to the north end of NARA park, the future home of the NARA summer camp offices in the South building and the Communication room in the North building and potentially provide hotspot services for users of the park, fields and concert attendees. This project will also connect two residential properties to such services as well as provide for future lighting of the DPW yard.**

P14: Permitting system - Please explain why a new online permitting system costs \$450,000. Is this technology not already available and used by other towns? **This cost was an estimate and we have reduced the amount to \$150,000. We are considering applying for a community compact grant to pay for some of the implementation costs that were assumed in the initial number. The technology would require annual user licenses in addition to upfront implementation and training costs.**

P16: Extra park between AHA and Dog park -

- We were assured the town would have no further expenses for the dog park after last town meeting approval, can the dog park committee handle this request as they agreed to handle additional expenses once the initial approval was given? **This project is to develop a cohesive design for the entire site that will include an additional park facility to be located between the AHA and dog park. One concept for this facility that is currently being consider is an age friendly park or senior friendly open space would allow for walking, sitting, meditation and gathering.**
- Would the \$200k cover all costs of designing/building a recreation center, or would additional funds be requested for ancillary work? **The funding would help support a cohesive design for the site which is a Select Board goal this year. Depending on the preferred design, additional funds may be needed.**
- Is the AHA interested in having this park here? **An open space amenity next to the Senior Housing is consistent with the concepts that AHA has presented for how the site would appear after its project was completed.**
- How much additional parking would be required given that the proposed parking lot was sized for the dog park? **The parking needs will be determined in the design process.**
  - If there is a town park here, does that mean that the dog park grant would not pay for the parking lot? If so, how much money would that cost us? **The goal of the Select Board is to have cohesive plan for all of the new uses proposed for the property. The funding for all of the proposed elements is still being determined.**
- What is the expected total cost of constructing this park? **This will be determined in the design process.**

- What maintenance expenses would be incurred? **Typical park and recreation maintenance expenses.**

P23: Social Worker FTE -

- How will this request be funded once the ARPA funds are spent supporting it? **Operating budget or grants, or some combination thereof**
- What is the expected outlay of funds after the 3 yr funding by ARPA is up? **\$85K-\$100k for salary and benefits.**
- Is it common for a town this size to have its own social worker? **The Acton Select Board have established multiple goals this year to enhance the social service and mental health support to our community.**
- How much would having our own social worker aid residents? **The primary function of this position would be to support our residents.**
- Social workers have an average salary in the state of \$60k. Will that actually cost the town \$100k a year ongoing? **Yes the \$300,000 estimate was meant to cover salary and associated benefits over three years.**
- If this department is created, when would additional staff be required? **The position would be added in FY23**

P32: Affordable housing - This is an extremely vague request, how is this currently handled? \$500,000 seems to be a large and arbitrary request. **This program is consistent with Select Board short term goal #2. The program would provide opportunities for the town to invest in improvements to existing affordable housing units or to rehabilitate market rate units to convert them to affordable units.**

P33/34: All day K based on income/Extended Day - Are these expenses making up for pandemic losses or are these ongoing expenses that will need to be absorbed into the district budget going forward? **This is a request of ABRSD seeking ARPA funding. All Day Kindergarten (ADK) lost significant revenue in its revolving account. It continued to incur all expenses because ABRSD needed the additional staff to implement both hybrid and remote school. The ADK challenges are really about lost revenue, but ADK is also an ongoing expense for the district.**

P42: Grant Admin/Procurement Office -

- What happens to this position at the end of three years? **The position would be funded within the budget likely as part of reorganization of existing positions after a vacancy.**
- What is the expected outlay of funds after the 3 yr funding by ARPA is up? **Approximately \$100k annually**
- Has this been a planned position? **The town staff have been very aggressive in seeking grants and collaborating with state agencies to bring funding to the town of Acton to support programs and reduce impacts on local taxpayers. View the [grant tracker](#) to see the funding we have received over the last 3 years. Most of this funding comes with reporting and procurement requirements that involve extra work. Additionally, we have been allocated nearly \$10M in federal funds related to the pandemic. We need additional resources to ensure that grant reporting requirements are being met**

and that public procurement laws are being followed. The ARPA funding would serve as startup funding to help establish the position.

- How does this annual cost compare to the value of grants we get in? Ie: can we expect more grants to cover the expense. Having a person dedicated seeking and administering grants will enhance the already very successful grant writing efforts of the town staff. One of the factors in deciding whether to pursue grants is determining whether we have resources to administer. Typical grants administration costs are up to 10% of the awards. The more we can absorb the 10% with in-house staff the better positioned we are to maximize the funding awarded.
- We have been told that hiring has been deferred. Would this position offset any of that hiring? A hiring freeze was in place early in the pandemic through late spring/summer 2021. We have been filling vacancies and reorganizing staffing resources with each new hire. We will continue to do this as we move forward and there may be opportunities to fill the grant/procurement position for the long term with a vacancy that occurs in the next three years.

One final question, why spend all of this now? Why not put most of it aside to be evaluated at a later date? Is there a possibility of planning for half (or some portion) of the money now and reserving the rest for consideration next year? The Board could decide to allocate all of this funding on October 18<sup>th</sup> or it could decide to reserve some for a future allocation. The plan that the Board approves will serve as the budget for how the ARPA funds will be utilized over the next three years. Each investment in the approved plan will be considered an approved allocation and the actual expenses will be determined through the internal application process. The application process will ensure that the expense is both consistent with the approved ARPA Investment Plan and is an eligible use of the funds. It is expected that the exact expenditures under each of the investment priorities may be different but not higher than the approved amount.