

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT THE NEXT BOS MEETING

TOWN OF WESTBROOK
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING
Tuesday, June 29, 2021
Mulvey Municipal Center
Multi-Media Room

CALL TO ORDER

First Selectman Bishop called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. In attendance included: First Selectman Bishop, Selectman Hall, Selectman Fuchs, Tony Cozza, BOF member, Jim Crawford, Registrar, Andy Schatz, and Donna Castracane, Director of Finance.

DISCUSSION ON THE STATUS OF ARPA (AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT) FUNDS; POSSIBLE ACTION ON NEXT STEPS

A fact sheet defined the allocation of the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) Funds in broad general terms (Support urgent Covid-19 response efforts to continue to decrease spread of the virus and bring the pandemic under control, replace lost public sector revenue to strengthen support for vital public services and help retain jobs, support immediate economic stabilization for households and businesses and address systemic public health and economic challenges that have contributed to the unequal impact of the pandemic on certain populations. These funds also deliver resources that recipients can invest in building, maintaining, or upgrading their water, sewer and broadband infrastructure). This fact sheet was provided although there has been considerable discussion, refinement and clarification of these funds.

Mr. Bishop offered the following analogy: Receipt of the Rescue Funds is like an unexpected inheritance; with many individuals wondering what their share of the funds will be.

Mr. Bishop has been in constant contact with RiverCOG, as a member of the Executive Committee. These discussions have included representatives from Congressman Courtney, Senator Blumenthal and Senator Murphy. We have also received information from CCM and COST. There continues to be, on a weekly basis, revisions/clarification on these funds; i.e. when they will be distributed, timelines to identify projects and use of funding, etc. Currently, it seems clear that we do not have to identify a project for the use of these funds for several months and we have until at least 2024 to spend the funds. Consequently, we don't need to be in a hurry to identify specific projects that Westbrook may consider for use of these monies.

The ARPA funds for the Board of Education were sent directly to the school system and did not have to "pass through" the municipal government. The Superintendent of Schools, several weeks ago, surveyed parents (with little response) for ideas for use of funds.

Westbrook, like other municipalities was informed recently that because Connecticut does not have County governments, Westbrook's share of "County" funds would be approximately \$1 million; thus, the initial funds of almost \$700,000 combined with this \$1 million means Westbrook will receive approximately \$1.7 million.

There was considerable discussion by members of the BOS and the audience members as to what specific projects the Town would identify by way of priorities. It was agreed that the next step in the process will be that sometime within the next 3 weeks, a meeting will be convened of municipal Department Heads to engage them in a discussion of their ideas. A hybrid BOS meeting was scheduled on Thursday, 7/22/21 @ 5:30 p.m. Chairmen of the various Boards/Commissions/Committees will be invited to present their ideas. In advance of this meeting, the Selectman's Office will distribute general guidelines for the distribution of the funds.

It was clearly understood that all of these discussions are to generate potential ideas and that at some time, once we have input from employees and Board/Commission/Committee Chairmen, the BOS may prioritize some of the recommendations and invite comment from the Westbrook general public. Until this process is complete, the BOS will be responsible for managing the initial process.

Ms. Castracane reported that a check/deposit was recently received in the amount of \$1 million. These funds were placed in a "grant" line. In consultation with the Treasurer, Ms. Castracane will discuss the

appropriate account to place the funds to accrue the most interest as the Town is permitted to keep interest earned on the money until it is used. She also will provide frequent updates to the BOF. Ms. Castracane has reached out to several Finance Directors and all of them like the COG Towns; have yet to finalize their specific approach to these funds.

It is important that during this initial phase of solicitation of ideas from entities noted above, we should not raise expectations of any individual group in Westbrook until we have a better sense of what projects should be funded.

The Middlesex County Revitalization Commission is interested in working with municipalities with regard to a possible implementation of funds for businesses that have been affected by Covid-19.

FIRST SELECTMAN'S REPORT – Mr. Bishop informed the BOS that he will take one week vacation the last week of July. Any remaining time will be taken only in days.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Bishop made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:47 p.m. Mr. Hall seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Attest,

Suzanne Helchowski
Executive Assistant

Noel Bishop
First Selectman