

Northfield ARPA Community Input Meeting
Sunday, September 11, 2022, 11:30 a.m.
United Church, Northfield and Zoom

The meeting was moderated by Mark Fournier. He gave a brief overview of the funding that consists of 1.9 million dollars, the use of which is broadly defined as “community good”. He noted that a small portion of the funds have already been allocated to the Economic Development Director position.

Later in the meeting Mark clarified that the Select Board has the authority to spend the funds anyway they see fit, but that they opted for community involvement by holding several meetings, making an online survey available, and seeking input. Merry Shernock has coordinated the outreach effort to engage the community in these decisions.

Please note: Comments by participants are paraphrased for clarity and brevity.

Charlie Morse, Select Board Member: About \$200,000 has been spent. On Tuesday, September 13, the Select Board will consider the proposal to spend \$90,000 on expanding broadband access in the community, via CV Fiber. CV Fiber has potential for a matching grant of up to \$90,000, which could mean a total of \$180,000 for this project. Please attend the meeting if you’d like to weigh in on the expenditure for this project. TDS is also putting in additional broadband, but no ARPA funds are part of that as of now.

Question: How was the \$90,000 determined?

Lydia Petty, Select Board Member: CV Fiber made a request to all towns in the CV Fiber district, asking for 5% of the project. Other towns have contributed, some beyond the 5% request. The details can be found online through CV Fiber.

Laura: Is the Economic Development Position for one year?

Charlie Morse: That has not been decided. Because it is a relatively new position it will undergo review and continued funding will depend on the outcome of that evaluation. Future salary for this position will likely be from the town budget based on taxes.

Mark: The ARPA funds must be designed by 2024 and must be spent by 2026. All ideas are welcome, it doesn’t matter if there are repeated suggestions from other meetings.

Paul Brown: Would like to see ideas and the price tag of suggestions already made.

Mark: The town will compile and distribute a list as a next step.

Debra Maloney-Evans: What ideas have come up in previous meetings? Are there exclusions, for example churches, schools, etc.?

Mark: One recurring idea is expansion of the water and sewer lines along Rte. 12, both north and south. Another idea is to reconfigure the Common. There have been a myriad of ideas. Compiling them will give us a sense of the most popular.

Julie Lombard: Would like to see expanding music and arts in the community. Has also heard a lot of ideas about the trail system.

Charlie: Funds can be used for water, sewer, broadband, social things. No payroll, or nothing toward the electric department.

Lydia: Will check to see if minutes from these meetings can be put on the Municipal website.

Susan: Repair of the water and sewer lines in town, heard that the fountain leaks. Infrastructure.

Laura: Reiterate support for extension of sewer up Route 12.

Sue MacMartin: Consider climate action. This issue impacts everyone and this is an opportunity to make our community more efficient and resilient. Perhaps collaborate with NU Environmental Science Department to identify specific things and ways to address. As temperatures get hotter in summer consider having the Municipal Pool be free on days when it reaches a certain temperature. Consider warming spaces for when power is out in the winter, cooling spaces in summer during extreme heat. Identify where the community is vulnerable to heat and drought and use funds to address those areas.

Mare McDaniel: Agrees with Sue M. regarding climate issues. What has happened to solar development in town?

Denise MacMartin: Make the Municipal Pool fee free regardless of temperature. It is a valuable asset that is underutilized, primarily due to cost. The daily and season fee are too much for many in the community. Swimming is an important skill, as well as the socialization the pool provides kids in the summer. The fees generate very little that covers the actual operating cost so let's find other ways to manage that portion of the budget. Maybe ARPA funds could be used for a couple of years while we explore other ways to cover/absorb the cost.

Julie L: Was a lifeguard at a free community pool in another town and it was "utopia".

Paul B.: Supporting the pool, which includes needed maintenance. The pool and library are both important assets that are too often seen as liabilities.

Greg: EV charging stations in town.

Sue M.: Wondering if citizens are unaware of the help available through Efficiency Vermont – how can we better inform people? Is the town working with anyone on converting to more renewable power for its own operations?

Peter Evans: Supports addressing climate change issues and free pool access. Also, upkeep of parks and recreation assets, particularly Dog River Park and the Falls Playground.

Mark: Reminder that funds have to be spent, they cannot be "banked" for future expenditures on things. There may be other opportunities for other funding that has different parameters.

Mary M.: What is being address regarding climate change in other groups? Woodchuck control? ☺

Laura: Improvements to the electrical and water lines which would have an impact on the climate issues. Folks can't convert to certain things that require electricity if there are deficits in that area. Vermont will become a refugee state when climate forces (more) people from the south to relocate.

Charlie: Reminder that ARPA funds cannot be used for the electric department. It is in good shape. The water and sewer lines through the Common are from 1905 and the need to be replaced at some point. It would cost about \$4 million to extend the sewer beyond current boundaries. ARPA funds could be used for a portion. Consideration must be given to ratepayers as well. Discussions regarding the electric department specifics can happen in another venue.

Laura: Solar arrays?

Charlie: Ours are currently private endeavors. The town does not own/operate any solar arrays.

Mark: ARPA funds can be used for matching for grants.

Paul B.: Important to maximize funds through matching if possible, also to present to the community the total of a project to be clear, for example, that the broadband is a \$180,000 project that we are getting for \$90,000 because of the matching funds.

Sue M.: To follow-up on the comment regarding Vermont becoming a climate refugee state – what are options for use for safe and affordable housing or upgrade of current housing. It should be considered.

Paul B.: The Planning Commission is working on zoning which is important in addressing climate change issues; there are provisions for things like UADs (utility accessory dwellings), changing lot sizes, density, etc. Attention should be paid to the zoning guides used in town's development. Need to think creatively. Encourage people to attend meetings while changes are still under consideration.

Lydia: There will be a public hearing on the Planning Commission work with opportunities for the community to participate.

Mark: ARPA can cover smaller things, like sidewalks and improved accessibility.

Mary M.: Install a sidewalk from the Crescent to the NU crosswalk by the NU parking lot. It is a dangerous stretch of road to walk without a crosswalk.

Merry Shernock: The Falls has no sidewalks. Sidewalks can be dangerous if not maintained in winter. Creating a bike lane would provide a space for walkers, plus it would automatically get plowed by the town.

Dylan: All these ideas are great; water and sewer in particular. As a new resident Northfield was chosen because of proximity to Montpelier and Paine Mt. bike trails. Support and expand the trails, sidewalk expansion on Rte. 12.

Mark: Benefit of using funds for certain things can be attracting new residents.

Laura: Currently no access to the town forest, there are four dead-end roads. We have a beautiful asset with no easy access and no parking area.

Mark: Trail extension into town was mentioned in another meeting.

Julie: A trail extension could be marked, like the Freedom Trail in Boston.

Lydia: Access to the forest via Slate is through land owned by Norwich.

Julie: Other communities have faced this issue of access and found solutions such as buying land for a parking lot.

Greg: Does the town have a green space plan?

Laura: The Conservation Commission has worked on the ash boar problem – are there opportunities to co-match something to clear roads to make it easier to address this problem?

Mark: Plug for folks to attend other meetings, including the Select Board meetings.

Susan: New bike paths should extend into town to increase visitors to retail establishments. There should be parking in town for those who want to park and bike out of town.

Mark: More businesses in town helps the tax base.

Lydia: Thank you to everyone who attended today. You are welcome to attend the Select Board meetings, or to send emails or talk with individual members.

Mark: An ARPA brochure is available in the back and it has a QR code to access the online survey.

Sue M.: Tried to attend a Select Board meeting virtually but could not get in. Can they be on Zoom?

Lydia: Town just recently acquired a Zoom account, will check on whether or not meetings will switch to this format.

Merry: There are many committees in town that need your help. There's something that will match your interest.

Mark: Thank you to everyone who attended today.

SUMMARY:

- Water and sewer extension along Route 12
- Municipal Pool Fee Free
- Expanded access to town forest
- Bike Lanes
- Climate change mitigation and preparation
- Sidewalk improvements