

TOWN OF STONINGTON
BOARD OF FINANCE SPECIAL MEETING
PUBLIC HEARING
District Office Board Room – 40 Field Street Pawcatuck CT
Wednesday, September 15, 2021
7:00 PM

The Board of Finance of the Town of Stonington held a Public Hearing at the Stonington School's District Office Board Room, located at 40 Field Street, Pawcatuck, on Wednesday, September 15, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. for the following purpose:

To present the itemized estimated budget of expenditures of the Town's planned American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) distribution, and use of the federal grant funds, received by the Town, and to hear the citizens of the Town in regard to any appropriation which they are desirous that the Board recommend or reject. A copy of the ARPA grant budget, as recommended by the Board of Selectmen, was available for review in the office of the Town Clerk and online at www.stonington-ct.gov. At this hearing, interested persons could appear in person to be heard and written communications received would be announced by the Board and entered as supporting documentation with these minutes.

Chairman O'Brien called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM.

Chairman O'Brien noted correspondence received prior to the meeting and that he was in receipt of six (6) letters greatly supporting the Mystic-Noank library funds request from members of the public. These letters had been forwarded to all members of the Board for review. The letters were received by:

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|-------------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Sara H Lathrop | 7 Osprey Lane | Mystic, CT 06355 |
| Sharon Barrett | 2 Quarry Road | Mystic, CT 06355 |
| Francis Hoffman | 1 Money Point Rd | Mystic, CT 06355 |
| Jack & Barbara Washburn | 1 Cove Hill Rd | Mystic, CT 06355 |
| Kay Tower | 2 Yacht Club Rd | Stonington, CT 06378 |
| Sally Salancy | 23 Hinckley St | Mystic, CT 06355 |

Additionally, Chairman O'Brien noted he was in receipt of three (3) letters greatly supporting the funding requests of all three libraries.

A letter received from Owen Hughes, 216 Cove Road, Stonington, CT 06378 supported funding all three libraries, but especially the Mystic-Noank library and their request for \$25,000 and then based on the formula that was developed, the other two libraries receive funding corresponding with the formula calculation at that level.

A letter received from Peggy Brissette, 192 Farmholme Road, Stonington, CT 06378 supported funding all three libraries.

A letter received from Nancy Brown Hughes, 216 Cove Road, Stonington, CT 06378 supported funding all three libraries, but especially the Mystic-Noank library and requested they be funded at the full \$25,000 request.

Additionally, the Chairman acknowledged an email received by Bruce Flax, Executive Director of the Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce, greatly supporting the Ocean Community Chamber's request for \$80,000 that was also provided to Board members and attached to these minutes for review.

The Chairman opened the meeting for Public Comments.

ARPA Request: \$138,000 Old Mystic Town Owned Site (former District Office)

Ms. June Strunk, 45 New London Tpke, Stonington, CT and Stonington Selectman, addressed the Board in support of the request. Ms. Strunk noted that the Facilities Task Force has been very involved with the site and have a plan and two potential entities interested in the site. Stating that the ARPA funds would be used to study the septic system, this initial investment would get the site to a point where interested parties such as the Inclusion Foundation or the Stonington Housing Authority would be able to step in with development plans.

ARPA Request: \$600,000 Water Loop

Mr. David Brown, 358 River Road, Pawcatuck, CT suggested to the Board that the Water Loop be extended, from Mary Hall Road, down River Road and continue to Greenhaven Road. Mr. Brown noted dry wells in the area and considering this additional mile and ½ of water line would benefit residents of the Town.

Ms. June Strunk, 45 New London Tpke, Stonington, CT and Stonington Selectman, requested that the Board fulfill the request at the original request of \$900,000. Noting that the total cost of the project is about \$2.8 million, the Town is earmarked to receive \$1.9 million in federal grants for the project leaving a balance of \$900,000. A reduction may be realized due to development in the area and funds received from the developer to support the project, but Ms. Strunk's concern was developments don't always happen. Ms. Strunk also acknowledged the project could be put into CIP.

ARPA Request: \$500,000 Stonington Housing Fund

First Selectman Danielle Chesebrough had previously provided to Board members a copy of an email she received from Susan Cullen, Director of Economic and Community Development, explaining the rationale for all taxpayers to support a Housing Rehabilitation Program. Agreeing with Ms. Cullen's commentary, Selectman Chesebrough noted that Ms. Cullen ran the Town of Groton Housing Rehabilitation Program for a number of years and the program had tremendous impact on not just those who participated, but their neighbors as well.

Speaking as a resident and as First Selectman, Selectman Chesebrough reminded the Board that as a previous Board of Finance member and those years of working together, she hoped she had earned the Board's trust. The Selectman reported there is an ever growing problem in the community and she has a plan to start investing in that problem, and asked the Board to trust her and work with her to meet the challenge of making a difference.

The Selectman noted this is not a new problem and she has been working on it since taking office two years ago but the only funding stream is CDBG funds that have at least two years of projects in the pipeline. The funding would help the middle who earn too much to access other social services programs but too little to address home infrastructure needs, the elderly and the disabled.

In closing, the Selectman noted she could make \$300,000 or \$100,000 work, but could not work with zero.

Leanne Theodore, 36 Stewart Road, Pawcatuck, CT and also Director of Human Services echoed the Selectman's plea and stated the Human Services department encounters many requests throughout the year for repairs, a new roof, septic replacement, window installation, all projects that are above and beyond what the department can handle. Director Theodore recommended a study by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2019) that noted the expected beneficial outcomes from housing rehabilitation including improved capital conditions, health outcomes, mental health, reduced hospitalization, reduced absenteeism in school, improved neighborhood quality and increased neighborhood stability. The Director also noted they get requests from the Planning and Zoning department for houses going into blight.

Deb Downie, 5 Back Acres Way, Stonington, CT and Stonington Selectman, expressed her support of the Housing Fund. Noting the questions proposed at the last meeting, Selectman Downie expanding on the intent of the program, reporting that the Town currently commits 2.3% of the Town budget to social services as compared to 16.7% to education. The intent of this housing fund would fill a gap in existing services. Based on examination of a similar long term program in Groton, the type of people being helped are residents who are retired, widows and widowers, single parents, those on fixed incomes and those people who fall between poverty level and sustainable income level. Responding to the Board's point that the program only helps a handful of families, the Selectman stated these would be current residents and taxpayers, not someone moving into town to take advantage of the program and by helping these families stay in their home might help prevent a ripple effect and more significant future cost to taxpayers associated with housing instability. The Selectman noted this is a proposal for a pilot program, and if successful the Town may be able to pursue other grants in the future. This is a one time not annual request for funding and stated even \$100,000 would get the program started.

Ms. June Strunk, 45 New London Tpke, Stonington, CT and Stonington Selectman, also commented, noting this program was not new, in fact it has been in the State of Connecticut for nearly 50 years and very successful. A fully sustainable project, the Selectman stated the first two years would be considered a pilot. After two years of successful implementation of the program, the Town could go to CDBG Connecticut Development Block Grant for additional funding. Not additional personnel would be needed. The Selectman noted a third party entity, ECHO, (Eastern CT Housing Opportunities) that would manage the funding. The Vice-President of ECHO is a Stonington resident and on the Stonington Housing Authority. The Selectman also responded to the Board's previous question of how many families would this benefit and noted while the numbers may not be large, how does assisting one of us not assist all of us?

ARPA Request: \$100,000 Southeastern CT Cultural Coalition

Wendy Bury, Executive Director, addressed the Board, noting the cultural sector was the hardest hit industries in the Town due to the COVID pandemic. The SE CT Cultural Coalition has 65 registered Stonington partner businesses, both profit, non-profit and individual artists. Ms. Bury noted the severe impact businesses have been dealt due to the ongoing COVID pandemic. Noting the fairly good summer season for some businesses and organizations, Ms. Bury stated the Delta variant and the increase in COVID cases has artists, performers and musicians cancelling shows. Events are being cancelled for the winter that had been rescheduled after a year and a half, continuing the impact on the community and the industry. Ms. Bury stated the Coalition has offered every town in the district of 44 towns the ability to take funds and redistribute them into that towns community alone through a

competitive grant process. Ms. Bury said she would like to see certainly the \$100,000 if not more funded by Stonington to be used to recover the hard hit industry.

ARPA Request: \$41,000 Program Van – New Heights

A representative from New Heights addressed the Board with the organizations request for funding toward a wheelchair accessible van. Addressing a question posed at the last meeting the representative distributed a handout showing the layout of the proposed van which will carry 4 passengers plus 1 wheelchair passenger and the driver. No CDL is required.

ARPA Request: \$80,000 COMO – HVAC System

Beth-Ann Stewart, Executive Director of the Stonington Community Center (COMO), thanked the Board for their continual support and partnership and recognized the COMO's 75 year history and anniversary. Explaining that the Center has an \$186,000 HVAC project ahead of them, Ms. Stewart was grateful of the Selectman's proposed \$80,000 allotment. Noting the Center is a licensed childcare center, the COMO has had to reinvent themselves to take on the role of the hybrid learning or families continuing childcare during COVID. Ms. Stewart indicated that the COMO converted the gymnasium and auditorium into classrooms which prompted the HVAC issue to the top of the priority list. The COMO has had success over the last 9 years addressing major infrastructure issues, and that did include fundraising, Town support, community support and donors in addition to pursuing a USDA mortgage. The USDA mortgage was needed to address the ADA compliance and security issues in the building. Ms. Stewart thanked the Board for their consideration to fully fund the request.

ARPA Request: \$10,000 PNC – Gazebo

First Selectman Chesebrough informed the Board that Susan Sedensky, Director, Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center, has withdrawn her request for funding thru the ARPA funds but may come before the Board for funding through CIP.

ARPA Request: \$65,000 Stonington Police Dept – Dispatch

Robert O'Shaughnessy, Chairman, Stonington Police Commissioners, and co-Chairman Bob Tabor both reported to the Board that the dispatch position is a very important communication between the public and the police officers and the police commission fully supports the funding for this position.

ARPA Request: \$52,309 Ledge Light Health District

Ms. June Strunk, 45 New London Tpke, Stonington, CT, Stonington Selectman and Board member of Ledge Light, informed the Board LLHD did not receive any funding from the government in any of the rescue plans and acknowledged their tireless efforts. Selectman Strunk strongly supports the funding as LLHD has been there for the Town and the entire region.

After hearing these comments, the Chairman opened the floor to any members of the public in attendance that wished to comment on the expenditure of ARPA funds.

New ARPA Request: \$25,000 Pawcatuck Little League – Drive In Movie Theater

Mr. Will Morrissey, Marketing Director, Pawcatuck Little League, requested consideration of \$25,000 for a drive in movie theater in the parking lot on 43 North Anguilla Road. After defending its State Championship this year and in anticipation of the Senior League (ages 13-16) making it to the New England Regional, Mr. Morrissey said the league is planning ways to raise funds for the League. The League has 37 teams and 397 boys and girls playing. The theater packages suggest a cost of \$30,000 - \$35,000. Mr. Morrissey also stated that a Golf Tournament was successful in raising \$11,000 this year.

After hearing the public comments, Chairman O'Brien adjourned the Public Hearing at 7:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,


Jill A Senior
Recording Secretary