

ARPA funds sought for vets monument

Stonington officials are asking for \$86,420 to aid construction costs

By Jason Vallee
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STONINGTON — The Board of Finance will consider a proposal tonight that, if approved, would use \$86,420 in American Rescue Plan Act funds to aid with costs as the community seeks to move

forward with installation of the long-sought Stonington Veterans Monument.

First Selectman Danielle Chesebrough, members of the Veterans Monument Committee led by David Brown, and Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce President Lisa Konicki have partnered in making the request, which comes with a slight twist — the money requested would specifically be used to supply work opportunities for local artists.

The funding would “catapult” an 18-month fundraising effort toward the finish line and provide a good-will matching donation from the town without requesting the money directly from the taxpayers, Chesebrough said. She said it would allow the project to move forward while prices are still fixed and warned that if deadlines aren’t met, it could lead to a significant increase in costs.

“We had been able to reach an agreement with Buzzi Memorials

and provided a down payment that allowed us to secure a fair price before the recent impact of inflation,” Chesebrough said. “We are now on a timeline, and if we can’t find a way to raise the money then we are looking at a considerable rise in the overall price tag.”

The concept for the memorial was one that was first brought to the town half a decade ago when Korean War Army veteran An-

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thony Lombardo learned in 2017 that Pawcatuck residents were not eligible to have their names added to the West-erly War Veterans Memorial monument.

After seeking help in bringing attention to the fact local veterans were not properly recognized, he found support in members of the Pawcatuck Fire Department, and officials worked with Lombardo and the Harley P. Chase Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1265 in Pawcatuck to create a partnership with a goal of making the memorial a reality.

Deed restrictions brought the project to a quick halt, however, but ongoing volunteer efforts eventually identified the green space in front of the Stonington Police Department as an ideal location for the project, and a committee was formed to begin fundraising and design efforts.

The monument, which will

be an eight-sided granite memorial, will list the names of the more than 7,000 residents who have served in the military since World War I and is expected to include interactive components that visitors can connect to using mobile devices.

Stacey Haskell, executive assistant for Chesebrough, has since taken the lead on planning and fundraising efforts.

“In just over 15 months we have managed to accumulate approximately \$110,000, which is a remarkable achievement I believe,” Brown said in a letter submitted to the Board of Finance ahead of tonight’s meeting. “We have been fortunate that many, many citizens (several hundred), and a few fairly substantial donations from grants and local businesses has enabled us to reach this figure ... but we are still approximately \$90,000 away from reaching our total cost of \$200,000 to complete the project.”

Chesebrough said the request made would seek to reallocate ARPA funding that had initially been put aside for HVAC repairs at Stonington Human Services — the town decided not to move forward with the project after bids came in at nearly four times the expected rates and well over the \$340,000 allocated, officials said — and to put a focus on the arts as part of the request.

In fact, Chesebrough said the funding would still not be done even with the ARPA request, and volunteers are committed to still raising the remaining \$15,000 in the coming months, including hosting a table at the Mystic Outdoor Arts Festival this month, an effort that last year brought in several thousand dollars in donations.

To date, the project has received 297 separate donations and has received six grants. Under Haskell, there have been 19 fundraising and networking events since June 2021.

Konicki said in a letter to the Board of Finance that while she cannot attend in person, she has personally worked with Chesebrough and the committee to assure that any allocated funds would benefit not only the monument, but the arts community as a whole.

“The \$86,420 would pay for eight porcelain sides that will be placed on the monument as well as a stipend for the artist(s) who will design the artwork on the porcelain,” Konicki said. “This is a significant aspect of the monument’s construction and worthy of ARPA funds support.”

“The sooner we can complete this project to honor our veterans, the better,” she said.

Finance board members are expected to vote on the request tonight during their meeting, which is scheduled to begin at 7:15 p.m. in the police station community room.

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