



Watertown City Council

Administration Building
149 Main Street
Watertown, MA 02472
Phone: 617-972-6470

ELECTED OFFICIALS:

Mark S. Sideris,
Council President

Vincent J. Piccirilli, Jr.,
Vice President &
District C Councilor

John M. Airasian,
Councilor At Large

Caroline Bays,
Councilor At Large

John G. Gannon,
Councilor At Large

Anthony Palomba,
Councilor At Large

Nicole Gardner,
District A Councilor

Lisa J. Feltner,
District B Councilor

Emily Izzo,
District D Councilor

Committee of the Budget and Fiscal Oversight Report of the Meeting of September 7, 2023

The Committee convened on Thursday, September 7, 2023 at 6:00 pm in the Richard E. Mastrangelo Council Chamber. It was a hybrid meeting, with remote participation by Zoom. Present were Vincent Piccirilli, Chair; Emily Izzo, Vice Chair and Nicole Gardner, Secretary. Also present in person were City Auditor Megan Langan, Assistant City Manager Steven Magoon, Council President Mark Sideris, Councilor Lisa Feltner, and resident Will Twombly. Attended by zoom were Councilors John Airasian, Caroline Bays, and Anthony Palomba, Library Trustee Leanne Hammonds, Senior Planner Lawrence Field, Housing Authority Executive Director Michael Lara, and residents Deb Peterson, Ernesta Krackiewicz, Elodia Thomas, and Jacky van Leeuwen.

The purpose of the meeting was a discussion on process for the Committee to evaluate American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Proposals. This is Step 3 of the process the Committee is using to make preliminary recommendations to the City Council on the allocation of ARPA funds, which is to "Synthesize the [ARPA proposal] input and assess it against the proposed criteria".

The meeting was called to order at 6:06 pm. Councilor Piccirilli welcomed all present, and explained the purpose of the meeting, noting that 32 proposals were made for ARPA funding, totaling \$24 million, more than twice the \$10.5 million in funds available. He explained that there would be no discussion of specific proposals at this meeting, and reminded the attendees that all proposals as well as other materials on ARPA can be found on the City's website. <https://watertown-ma.gov/794/American-Rescue-Plan-Act-ARPA>

Councilor Piccirilli next requested Auditor Langan to ask Clifton/Larson/Allan, the accounting firm retained by the City for ARPA, to review the proposals and provide their advice as to which, if any, were not allowable by law. The Committee will only consider those proposals which are allowable.

Councilor Piccirilli noted that one email had been received regarding the process, from resident Marcy Murningham, suggesting a 0 to 2 scale be used in assessment, and showing how that would work for evaluating a proposal's alignment with the Charter Preamble and the new Comprehensive Plan, which are included in the criteria (see attachment).

Councilor Gardner proposed using a 4 point scale, because it forces the evaluator to form an opinion, one way or the other. After discussion, the Committee agreed to use a 4 point scale with 4 being the highest score. It was also agreed that when the time came for assessment, the following process would be used:

1. Each Committee member would score the proposals independently across each criteria.
2. Each Committee member would enter their scores on a spreadsheet sent to the Council Clerk.
3. The Council Clerk would consolidate the scores into a single spreadsheet, which would be used by the Committee in their deliberations at the next meeting.

Councilor Bays expressed a concern over the amount of public input in the assessment process.

Councilor Piccirilli explained that the deliberations would be in public meeting, and the Committee would invite input from the public and Councilors.

President Sideris recommended that the Committee bring the process they will use to the City Council for approval.

Councilor Feltner expressed a concern that the public and the Committee would not have an opportunity to hear from those who submitted proposals, and ask questions. Councilor Piccirilli explained that each proposer will be invited to present their project to the Committee, and answer questions.

Council Gardner suggested that these meetings happen before the Committee members do their scoring, so that members have full information, and this was agreed.

Councilor Palomba noted that some proposals were detailed and spoke to the criteria directly, and others were more conceptual, making it hard to evaluate them.

It was agreed that the Chair would write to all who submitted proposals that are allowable by law to invite them to meet with the Committee to present their project; the note would include:

- Dates being offered for BFO Committee meetings to review proposals
- 15 minutes time slot per project
- Criteria for evaluation
- The types of questions they might expect
- That questions would be asked by both the public and the Committee
- Any other pertinent information

It was also agreed that the Chair would write to people who submitted proposals that are not allowable by law (if any) to let them know that that the City would not be able to move forward with their proposal, and encouraging them to seek alternative sources of funding.

Councilor Palomba said that ultimately he expects the Committee deliberations would come out with proposals landing in one of three categories: Fund Fully, Fund Partially, and Not Able to be Funded.

Jacky van Leeuwen said that she hoped the criteria reflect the urgency of various needs within Watertown.

Deb Peterson said that she believed the criteria don't give the guidance needed, because they do not touch on what are the highest priorities within Watertown. She suggested that high level guidance such as what percent of the funds should go to city priorities 1, 2, 3, is needed.

Councilor Gardner noted that the process and criteria being used were developed in public meetings with input from the public, the Councilors, and the City staff, much earlier this year. She also noted that if the Committee had agreed to the approach being suggested, the Council -- not the Committee -- would have been needed to develop and approve the percentages by priority. She did not support changing the process at this point, especially since the proposals were developed based on the approved

and published criteria. Finally, she noted that time is pressing for the City to allocate funds, given the restrictions in the law.

Councilor Piccirilli added that ultimately, each member of the Committee and of the Council will need to use their personal judgment, weighing the pros and cons carefully, in voting on ARPA allocations. He noted that the proposals were very different in scope, scale, focus, detail provided and so on, and the Committee has to work with the proposals submitted. It will be challenging to rank and assess, but that is what is required as our next step.

➔ **Action Item:** Councilor Gardner made a motion, seconded by Councilor Izzo, that the Committee ask the City Council to approve the detailed ARPA process steps, specifically:

1. Clifton/Larson/Allen review for compliance with the law as the first step, and prior to meetings with proposers; and the BFO Committee will only consider proposals that are legally compliant.
2. The BFO Committee will hold meetings with proposers for presentations and questions, in 15 minute time slots, with the public and Council encouraged to participate. All are encouraged to send questions in to Council Clerk, who will forward them to the proposer prior to the meetings.
3. Independent initial scoring by members prior to deliberation, using 4 point scale
4. The BFO Committee will collectively score proposals using a 1-4 scale after the meetings.
5. The BFO Committee will then meet to deliberate and develop its preliminary recommendation for the City Council and public feedback.

The motion was voted unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 7:12 pm on a unanimous vote.

Report prepared by Nicole Gardner

Attachment: Marcy Murningham email

ARPA Criteria Meeting Tonight

Marcy Murningham <marcy.murningham@gmail.com>

Thu 9/7/2023 2:33 PM

To: Nicole Gardner <ngardner@watertown-ma.gov>

Cc: Piccirilli, Vincent J <vpiccirilli@watertown-ma.gov>; Izzo, Emily <eizzo@watertown-ma.gov>; McClure, Christopher <cmclure@watertown-ma.gov>; Equity Culture / Civic Fiduciary Action Labs <equityculture.civicfiduciary@gmail.com>; Moral Money Boston <moralmoney.boston@gmail.com>

Dear all,

I wanted to submit my comments, as I'll not be able to attend tonight's Budget + Fiscal Oversight Committee meeting on the process for reviewing ARPA funding submissions

The 32 (as of this moment) submissions display a rich and varied set of ideas for improving life in Watertown. That they come from both the community and government reinforces the shared purpose and values held by citywide members. *Bravo!* and *Brava!* to all who took the time and care to prepare them!

As you review the submissions, I hope you include whether or not they specify how they align with the Comprehensive Plan (the latest version yet to be ratified) and the Charter *Preamble*, set forth in the Strategic Criteria approved on February 28, 2023.

In my cursory review* of those submissions, I've seen some do and some don't.

Given the absence of more refined "key performance indicators" (KPIs) — which can be developed down the road, much like has occurred with other models of "[sustainability reporting standards](#)," "[values-based accounting standards](#)," and "[sustainable development goals](#)," with which I am quite familiar — you might consider scoring them on a 0 to 2 scale, with zero denoting "**no reference**" to either the Comprehensive Plan or *Preamble*, "1" denoting "**mention**", and "2" denoting "**more specific elaboration**".

You could refer to this as the "Value-Added Score," (VAS), or "Value-Added Premium" (VAP, not to be confused with VAPE 😊). The higher the score, the more aligned the proposal claims to be.

However you proceed, rest assured you're continuing to forge a pathway for articulating, measuring, and managing values in public life that's both pragmatic and prophetic. As we near the Republic's 250th birthday in 2026 — not to mention Watertown's 400th birthday in 2030 — this is a wonderful way of resetting the paradigm for democracy in America for the 21st century.

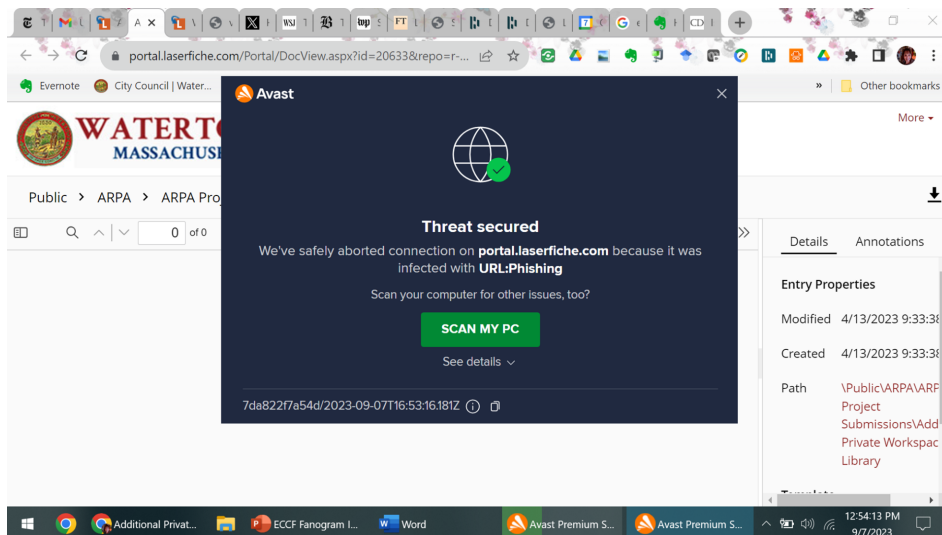
Good luck on your deliberations!

Wishing you well,

Marcy.

* I've discovered that access to the [ARPA portal and specific documents](#), from both my desktop and mobile phone, generates alarm bells regarding phishing attempts (see below for desktop screenshot). My work-around was to download the docs on my Android to read them before deleting them.

Am copying Chris McClure here, to alert him to this problem.



Marcy Murningham

Principal Architect, Equity Culture / Civic Fiduciary Action Labs

Select writings on "[Wealth, Power, and the Public Interest:](#)

[Building Equity Culture and Civic Stewardship,](#)" *New England Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 30, no. 1 (2018)

View LinkedIn profile [here](#)

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