



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 January 3, 2023

The Committee convened on Tuesday January 3, 2023 at 5:00 pm in the Richard E. Mastrangelo Council Chamber. Present were Vincent Piccirilli, Chair; Emily Izzo, Vice Chair and Nicole Gardner, Secretary. Staff present were City Manager George Proakis, Senior Planner Larry Field, and Patrick George, Veteran Services Officer and acting Director of Senior Services. Also present were Council President Mark Sideris, and Councilors Lisa Feltner and Anthony Palomba. Roughly 20 residents and interested parties attended the meeting.

Councilor Piccirilli called the meeting to order at 5:07 pm. The purpose of the meeting was to review and, if needed, refine the process the BFO Committee had previously laid out to get public input on how the City might spend its ARPA funds.

Councilor Piccirilli began by explaining that Watertown will receive \$10.5 million from the American Rescue Plan Act. The funds must be obligated by December 31, 2024, and expended by December 31, 2026. He also noted that the range of things the money can be spent on has been evolving over time.

Councilor Piccirilli then described the overall process the Committee had designed and publicized last spring for developing its recommendations on ARPA spending for the City Council. That process was:

1. Host a hybrid community forum to educate the public on the Act, our allocation, the intended uses of the funds, and the opportunities, limitations, and requirements on how we use the ~\$10.5 million available to us. The presentation would be given by an expert municipal accounting firm, such as Clifton Larson Allen.
2. Create a page on the City website to provide ARPA information and to enable residents to make recommendations.
3. Invite suggestions and recommendations from both residents and from the City Administration.
4. Synthesize the input and develop a draft set of recommendations.
5. Share the BFO Committee's draft recommendations publicly and invite community feedback and further input from the City Administration.
6. Revise the BFO Committee's recommendations accordingly, and submit a proposal to the full City Council, for debate and vote.

After discussion, the Committee decided to keep to that overall process. With regard to the first community forum, it was also decided that:

- a) City Manager Proakis concurred that Hannah York of Clifton/Larson/Allen would be an ideal presenter. He will work with CLA to find a date later this month.
- b) To provide more context for the public, once CLA has completed its presentation, the Administration will share examples of how neighboring and comparable communities are using ARPA funds.

The Committee then discussed how best to educate the public and gather community input in more detail. Other councilors, City Manager Proakis and the public shared many ideas and reactions during this discussion, helping to hone the approach that will be used. The following themes and observations emerged during the robust discussion:

- Education of the public is critical in order for them to understand what is allowed -- and not allowed -- under the law.
- The community forum should include information on what other tranches of ARPA funding were or will be spent in Watertown, so that people would understand where they may be gaps locally. It would also be helpful to understand what types of investments could be executed by 12/31/26, since all spending must occur by that date.
- It is essential that the City publicize the community forum and share simple and accessible information on ARPA as broadly as possible, to both community members and organizations that serve them. This will help ensure broad participation across the community, including people whose voices may not always be heard. Examples of such organizations included the Council on Aging, the Library, and the Watertown Housing Authority. Channels to reach people include WCATV, Watertown News, District Councilor communications, and the City's social media channels.
- The City's website should offer both easy to understand overview information on ARPA, and FAQs. It should also, as much as possible, provide interactive ways for residents and organizations to give input on the City's website.
- People should have multiple ways to give input, including participating in Flash Vote, submitting written proposals, calling in ideas by phone, email, paper surveys. This is especially important for residents who are not online.
- It will take time for people to understand options and prepare their recommendations; adequate time will need to be given for the public to be able to truly engage and be heard.
- The BFO should describe what information it will be looking for in proposals such as dollars to be spent, by when, on what, how the proposal meets the goals of ARPA, why this should be a priority for Watertown, and how it might help us meet other goals of the City. This will equip the public to make effective proposals.
- There is a growing sense of urgency given the time by which funds must be expended.
- The objective synthesis of recommendations may be complex and time consuming; the BFO Committee may want to work with a consultant on this.

The following were agreed to:

1. The BFO Committee will host a hybrid community forum in late January at which an outside expert will present an overview of ARPA, explaining the allowed uses of the funds, and the opportunities, limitations, and requirements on how we use the funds available to us. The outside expert is expected to be Hannah York of Clifton/Larson/Allen, a firm under contract to the City and which has done similar meetings for other towns and cities in Massachusetts. Mr. Proakis will arrange CLA's participation.
2. At this meeting, the Administration will also share examples of how other communities, including but not limited to our neighbors, are using their ARPA funds. This would cover both types of expenditures, and whether the money has been concentrated or used across numerous categories.
3. Residents will be able to ask questions and give input during this forum.
4. This forum will be made available to the public afterward (for example on WCATV, on the City's website ARPA page, via social media, etc.)

Budget and Fiscal Oversight Committee Report January 3, 2023

5. The City will work with the BFO Committee to make the ARPA page as robust as possible, including easy to understand resources, the forum, FAQs, and how to participate.
6. The City will request a simple “one pager” outlining allowable uses of funds from CLA for posting as quickly as possible on the ARPA page.
7. The City will use FlashVote as another way to elicit community input for the BFO Committee.
8. The public will have two months after the first community forum to submit proposals. This period may be extended if needed.

The meeting adjourned at 7:24 pm on a unanimous vote.

Report prepared by Nicole Gardner