AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA)
July 30, 2023 – Special Joint Meeting with the Board of Selectman
Via Hybrid

Members Present: Chair Dave Koji, Vice Chair Greg Barden, Stan Soby, Denise Mizla, Jenn Cox

Others Present: First Selectman Andreas Bisbikos, Jason LaChapelle, Rosemary Coyle, Debbie Bates, Denise Turner

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

   First Selectman Bisbikos called the Board of Selectman meeting to order at 6:01 pm.

2. **CALL TO ORDER**

   Dave Koji called the ARPA Ad-Hoc committee meeting to order at 6:01 pm.

3. **CITIZENS' COMMENTS**

   Taras Rudko commented that he had concerns that there was little advertising regarding tonight's meeting. He commented the town and businesses received ARPA funds, but the citizens have not. He stated that if the Board of Selectman (BoS) does not facilitate a program to the help those in need in town it is very disingenuous. He asked the citizens on line and in person to hold those accountable and get the funds to the individuals and people that actually need it.

   Mike Dubreuil commented that ARPA and the BoS worked together well for several projects. He thanked Selectman LaChapelle for his work in bringing this program forward . He is in favor of giving direct cash assistance to the citizens who are still struggling from the pandemic. He stated that the Selectman should have given more back to the citizens.

   Mike Egan commented that there is disinformation on social media. M. Egan stated that the economics are favorable in the U.S. right now. This 300,000 program will not fix the youth roof or the town HVAC system, or Highland Farm water tower project. Colchester taxes have increased less than almost any other municipality in the state. The average tax payer will increase less than 75 dollars. He stated that most towns have used ARPA for projects, and Colchester is using ARPA for deferred maintenance.

   Deanna Bouchard stated that she is in favor of cash assistance to citizens. She stated that there is money in the fund balance to fix the roof or do the HVAC. She is in favor of taking money from ARPA projects to assist 300 families at one thousand dollars per family. C. Collins said that this program can go forward. D. Bouchard is strongly in favor of the cash assistance program.

   Gerrie T. has concerns with the application process. She believes that we all want to help people. She thinks that we should help the people of which the Covid pandemic really set them over the edge. She is concerned that too many people would apply. Gerrie is concerned that some may take money from those that are really below

income. She does not understand why we aren't using the 575,000 money to help the low income families. Then we can use the ARPA funds for the projects.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE SOCIAL SERVICES GRANT PROGRAM

J. LaChapelle spoke in favor of cash assistance of $300,000 in direct cash to 300 families. He stated that the same oversight of the businesses is not being applied to individuals (not enough oversight in business and too much for individuals). The Social Services program was voted 4th by the citizens in terms of desire to fund. J. LaChapelle stated that there is enough money in the fund balance to fulfill projects. He provided stories about community members that are struggling, even though they reached out to Social Services. J.LaChapelle stated that all members, except Rosemary, told J. LaChapelle that they were in favor of this project (Social Services grant).

Motion by: J. LaChapelle
To earmark $300,000 in ARPA funds to help citizens of Colchester that were negatively impacted and disadvantages by the Covid 19 pandemic.
Second By: A. Bisbikos
Discussion: J. LaChapelle will let the town know who does not go along with this motion. D. Bates stated that the dates on the application had passed. A. Bisbikos said the motion should be broken down. D. Koji clarified that the Social Services program of $100,000 was voted 4th by the community, and that the new Social Services grant is a new program. J. LaChapelle stated that we have enough money to take money from the roof or HVAC in the amount of $164,000. D. Koji has concerns that UHY said that it will cost $30,000 to administer the program. D. Mizla asked J. LaChapelle about the $100,000 that was the initial amount. J. LaChapelle stated that he wanted to add $200,000 to the $100,000. D. Mizla asked if Social Services could help out with the implementation of this program. She also asked how word would get out. J. LaChapelle stated that he will go door to door to let people know about it. A. Bisbikos said that he is not concerned with getting the word out. He is saying there are two components: the amount and how the application works. R. Coyle said that she feels that this is backwards because C. Collins brought up issues with the way the program is developed. You do that first and then decide the money.
No vote

Motion by: R. Coyle to table the motion until we have a discussion with V. Geato, C. Collins, and ARPA.

D. Koji stated that he obtained information from C. Collins at UHY regarding how the program would role out. C. Collins showed her Powerpoint.

V. Geato from Social Services stated that her original program is different than the give back program. Every month that ticks on makes it difficult to say the program can be fulfilled in the ARPA timeline. V. Geato stated Social Services did not let people not have food. Social Services cannot subsidize a families' rent and no amount of ARPA will allow that. V. Geato created the chart for you last year. Social Services received a grant of $36,000. Our food bank does not need $500,000. There is still some money on a United Way grant. To just put an arbitrary number out is just that, one thousand is arbitrary as well. The Social Services program serves approximately 140 households a month through the food bank and 90% are seniors or those with disability. She thinks we need to look at what the real issues are.

D. Koji asked if there were families the town has turned away for assistance and if there were, can Social Services be expanded.

J. LaChapelle stated that the goal of the give back grant is to help people that are struggling. He understands that it is not long term subsidizing.

D. Koji asked if there were any income ceilings on the application. A. Bisbikos mentioned that there may be more people (over 300) that qualify and the amount would be adjusted.

C. Collins spoke that J. LaChapelle's Household Direct Cash Assistance program has certain parameters and so did the business assistance – UHY did behind the scenes work to determine that parameters were met. UHY did do work to determine that a business was eligible. For a Cash Assistance program, ARPA wants you to serve low to moderate incomes. She explained on how individuals received ARPA funds (stimulus checks), and there were parameters (children, income, etc). The intent of ARPA was to provide funding to state and local recovery to assure that government needs were met to address pre Covid issues. The household assistance was to go to those that were negatively impacted and what the funds would be used for (medical bills) and you cannot some things with it (food, tobacco, movies, etc). If you say you are a problem that is a cash assistance, even though there is a signed attestation, then the family would have to pay that money back. It is an educational process. ARPA cannot do it like a stimulus program – it must be reported on your tax returns. If a household is making $75,000, a thousand dollars could put them in a different tax bracket. That has happened. W-9s would have to be given and the town would have to give tax documents. If the household owed back taxes, they are not eligible. UHY would have to reach out to the family to determine what their taxes were, unemployment, etc. Then, after the household spends the money, they would have to save the receipts. The cash can go directly to their bills, but the family would have to keep receipts. UHY stated that there was one business that did not utilize the funding properly. ARPA funds are not the same as stimulus checks. The final rule (1000 Page document) does not allow it to be used like a stimulus check. Medical, utility, childcare, rent. ARPA does not allow for food and groceries or car payment. ARPA is for what was needed to help her household.

D. Turner asked if it would be beneficial for an individual to provide utility bills as part of the application. She also asked if the application is written correctly. C. Collins stated that most applications had documents to support a need.

R. Coyle asked if there is anything that should be stated to show the applicant is low to moderate income. C. Collins reported that 11%, or more than 1600 people may qualify for assistance. The crucial years are 2020-2021. ARPA final rule does not allow for giving back to every single tax payer.

J. LaChapelle asked for C. Collins to give more information as to why an individual is being treated differently than the business. C. Collins reported that most municipalities are having more stringent applications. Colchester was the only municipality to not require supporting documents. J. LaChapelle wants more clarification as to why businesses received one million and they may not be struggling, but individuals are being required to document. C.

Collins disclosed what the ARPA funds for families could be used for in a family. She wanted to caution that some families may be disappointed (false hope).

V. Geato stated that she is interested in meeting the needs of the people most in need. She feels like $100,000 is the correct amount that can be used by December 2024. D. Koji asked if Social Services could use the $300,000. V. Geato has a higher threshold than the giveback program. Social Services do not have funds to give out money for utility bills, etc. R. Coyle asked how people access Social Services. V. Geato replied that word of mouth, 211, or TVCCA also refers.

New provision of services to those that require (funeral, etc) and you can carve out a laundry list of services to offer. A. Bisikos asked for clarification. C. Collins said that the town can decide what to include in the application. D. Koji said that is seems like we want to increase the bucket, and A. Bisbikos agreed, but there was disagreement in terms of how best to implement.

R. Coyle asked V. Geato is she could expand the bucket to car assistance, mental health, etc? V. Geato said we need to look at the individual and whether they can afford what they need.

J. LaChapelle responded to D. Koji's question about why he does not want the give back program to go through Social Services. J. LaChapelle stated that an application to the First Selectman's office is easier than asking for help through Social Services. J. LaChapelle wants the individuals to sign a box that they were negatively economically impacted by Covid 19.

C.Collins stated that there were individuals that did not spend the money as intended. She also stated that if someone makes a complaint about one of the town's ARPA program, the town could be liable and have to give the money back.

J. LaChapelle read from the Treasury Department Final Rule page 81, related to cash assistance.

G. Barden says that in C. Collin's program, if a family wants to apply, they would have to show negative impact, but the Social Services give back program would allow more people to receive more services. J. LaChapelle restated that he wants the individuals to sign a attestation and not have to provide documentation (same as the town).

D. Bates asked about behavioral health and V. Geato stated that she has not been able to hire anyone. D. Bates stated that with Social Services there is a person they can speak to, and J. LaChapelle states that he is not talking about getting help from Social Services, but a one-time assistance program to get over a hump.

V. Geato's income qualification depends on how many children you have, but is 60% of the poverty rate.

D. Mizla stated that the downside is that a person has to declare it on their tax return. But if Social Services broadened their program then it would be too much for Social Services, so using UHY would work. Also, using an on-line application would allow more people to apply.

J.Cox stated that she has similar concerns with the amount of money being arbitrary and the UHY cost.

AMENDED MOTION by R.Coyle
For ARPA, C. Collins, and Social Services, to work together and formulate a plan, up to $300,000
Second By: D. Turner

Discussion
Andreas Bisbikos would like for the Board of Selectman to be a part of the development. R. Coyle would like an initial conversation to start it. C. Collins gave a list of things that would need to be included in that application. A. Bisbikos would like the Board of Selectman to be working on this in a timely manner. A. Bisbikos stated that something will have to be reduced if the amount is up to $300,000. The ARPA money needs to be encumbered by December 2024 and needs to be spent by December 31, 2026.

J. LaChapelle stated that we are kicking the can down the road.

D. Turner stated that she has been in favor of a give back program, but needs all of the information.

C. Collins said that Colchester should be

MOTION By: J. LaChapelle
To add a deadline for this final draft to be completed of September 15, 2023
Second By: A. Bisbikos
Discussion: R. Coyle said that we should say by the end of September 2023.

As a friendly amendment to my motion, R. Coyle to amend her motion.

MOTION BY: R. Coyle
To develop a program, up to $300,000, with UHY, ARPA committee, and Social Services, so that we might expand the participation in receiving services that are not covered under the cash giveback program with a deadline of up to September 30, 2023.
Second by:
Vote: Unanimous to approve

MOTION TO ADJOURN BY: D. Bates
NO SECOND

CITIZENS COMMENTS:
D. Bouchard stated that the Board of Selectman should do what was promised, and that C. Collins bringing up She stated that citizens should not have to produce documentation and they should not have to go through Social Services. J. LaChapelle made an application, citizens fill out the application, it goes through UHY, and it is done. Should ARPA still be involved, absolutely not. D. Bouchard thanked J. LaChapelle.

K. Kardys stated that the individuals in the community need ongoing assistance and not a one time assist. Social Services should be involved.

M. Egan said that what is being proposed is administration nightmare. We have a program that actually works with someone that does this. Neighbors may call each other out. The Director of Social Services is not qualified to handle this, but the First Selectman's office is going to handle this? We want to help people out but we also have community needs and we are falling behind.

C. O'Donnell thinks Social Services is equipped to handle the funds and should handle the pails. They can do it fairly and they have a certain amount of people. People should not be ashamed and everyone in this room was hurt for Covid. These funds will be taxable; with funds through Social Services, it will be tax free.

B. Dennler stated that they best way to meet the need for the most residents would be through Social Services due to the administrative load.

J. Farrell said that there was too much repeating of the same thing at the meeting. J. Farrell stated that he felt that V. Geato had knowledge and expertise.

T. Morach stated that it is important to follow professional advice and should be followed. There is embarrassment and pride involved with approaching Social Services. She would like to approach someone that understands confidentiality. She wonders if Colchester has enough man power to handle the program. Is 11% of households or 11% of individuals.

M. Dubreuil stated that many people are very proud and do not want to go to Social Services. He shared a personal story. There does seem to be a double standard of how we treated the businesses versus the individuals.

MOTION TO ADJOURN BY: D. Bates
SECOND BY: R. Coyle

MOTION TO ADJOURN BY: D. Mizla
SECOND BY: D. Koji

Meeting adjourned at 9:19 pm.