

ARPA Meeting Minutes - DRAFT
March 23, 2023

This hybrid meeting was called to order at 6:40 PM after difficulties with the Zoom platform.

Members present at the Town Office: Kathy Marchant, Lindsay Fletcher-Minor and Jack Slagle

Members participating by Zoom: Andy Iwaskiewicz, Fran Leavitt and Mary Hysick

Guests at the Town Office: Cathy Mander-Adams as Zoom host and to offer public comment, Carol Caldwell-Edmonds as C.U.D. representative and Alec from the LCPC to evaluate public suggestions for regulation compatibility.

Additional guests participating by Zoom were Lisa Birmingham (new Interim Director) and Fabian Bourgeois from Lamoille FiberNet.

Motion made by Mary with 2nd by Jack to table review of the minutes until after our guests had completed their presentations. Passed Unanimously.

Carole Caldwell-Edmonds formally submitted the CUDs request for some of the Town's ARPA funds to be committed to Lamoille Fibernet before the upcoming deadline to receive matching funds, May 1, 2023. Carole referenced her recent PowerPoint presentation and a document outlining the specific uses that we could specify for those funds. Carol will ensure that Kathy has a copy of this document. Carol mentioned that one use could be to fully, or partially, fund long "drops" for Belvidere residents who live far from poles.

Carol indicated that the CUD was still in RPF (is that the right acronym?) discussions. She gave an overview of the amounts that other Vermont towns had committed to various CUDs throughout the State which averages 4% of a Town's total ARPA fund allotment. Fabian mentioned that Belvidere is highly underserved with most residents receiving 4/1 service (mbps download/upload) Andy added that when determining the potential commitment amount we should consider not only the percentage trends, but the severity of Belvidere's needs. Carol added that with a \$3 per foot drop costing a 4% commitment by Belvidere, combined with matching State funds, could fund numerous drops and make internet access more affordable to those residents who live well off the road. Regulations state that money committed by Belvidere must be spent in Belvidere.

Mary inquired as to how much the CUD had received, overall to date, in grant funding. Lisa replied they had received \$1.4 million with pending Act 71 construction application grants of \$14.8 million. Lisa indicated that the pre-COVID plan would have required the CUD to go to the bond market for funding, but the new sources of funding eliminate this necessity. She said that per mile cost for running fiber in Belvidere is in the high \$50,000 per mile. The cost to "build-out" all of Lamoille county is estimated at \$28-\$44 Million. Lisa also indicated that construction costs have remained steady. Jack inquired about their plans to share/run fiber in Belvidere and Mary more specifically asked if the CUD was planning to run a second cable up 109 where the Mansfield Fiber cable already existed. Lisa replied that they do have a plan where this would be the case. Jack further inquired why the CUD hadn't partnered with

Mansfield Fiber. Lisa seemed to indicate that the State's matching funds can only be leveraged by the CUD. Carol reminded the group that the industry is not regulated and therefore not necessarily cooperative.

Carol and Lisa reminded the members that the private sector's incentives to finish out the "last mile" are very low and that they would appreciate our commitment of up to 4% by May 1, 2023. Andy noted that the Townspeople will still be able to choose any options that become available even if the Town makes this financial commitment to the CUD. Our guests from the CUD departed at 7:12 PM.

Kathy informed the members that 3 Electronic and 6 Delivered responses had been received since our last meeting and before the 3/1/23 deadline. Kathy, Lindsay and Jack opened the suggestions and read them aloud for all. The summary is as follows:

- 1) Upgrade Town Green for camping, fix up old school for public use and add electricity, if necessary
- 2) Fiber internet infrastructure, playground equipment for recreational field, community garden/orchard
- 3) Town Forest with trails and LT access, Wind Phone, Shared space in the Belvidere Central School
- 4) Reimburse Community Club for lost revenue, \$25K for repairs and preservation of Junction School, \$50K for Parcel ID tax map update, Belvidere Cemetery Expansion
- 5) Parcel map update, paint Town Clerk's office, repave those town roads which are already paved
- 6) Walking path of StayMat around the Community Club ball field, program to allow online tax payments and dog licensing, clean graffiti off covered bridges
- 7) Microcells, Belvidere Cemetery expansion
- 8) Enhance broadband infrastructure
- 9) Mitigate fiscal effects of COVID, invest in emergency response system(s), investigate creating a fire district, invest in infrastructure projects per Town Plan

The group had a preliminary discussion about how to begin organizing the suggestions by looking for repeated patterns, fulfillment of regulations, considering the "big picture" as outlined by the resident from suggestion 9 (above), and by analyzing future resiliency and future tax burden.

Alec was asked about what ARPA states about projects with future tax burdens,, but was not certain. He did mention that Town's will need to sustain the projects after the grant money runs out. Alec was not aware of any timelines for infrastructure build-out by the CUD, but suggested that the interim director was hired to move things along. Mary commented that the CUD's discussions are hard to track due to the frequency with which all their committees enter "Executive Session". There was general consensus that they have not been as transparent as could be hoped.

Kathy asked Alec to review all the suggestions received for his opinion on their ability to withstand ARPA regulations. He indicated that road projects could be tricky and that there is already a lot of funding for transportation outside the ARPA funds. He said all other suggestions seemed well within the guidelines. Cathy Mander-Adams raised a question about the Community Club being a private entity and Alec said that projects with private entities may require contracts stipulating fund usage.

Alec reminded the group that the spending obligation plan is due by the end of 2024 and the money must be spent by the end of 2026. Alec explained a method of avoiding the spending deadline by using monies to pay normal expenses, such as salaries, and then replacing that money from the general fund. He said the State is "encouraging" this process.

Motion by Mary and seconded by Kath for Fran to update the spreadsheet from the information contained in these minutes. Motion passed unanimously and Fran will work with Andy to begin grouping the suggestions into categories.

Motion made by Fran to accept minutes of February meeting with change to next meeting date. Seconded by Kathy and passed unanimously.

Motion made by Fran for a special meeting on April 20, 2023 for the singular purpose of deciding what to do about the CUD's request for fund commitment by 5/1/23. Motion seconded by Mary and passed unanimously.

Motion by Kathy to adjourn. Seconded by Andy and passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:11 PM.

Special Meeting 4/20/23
Next Regular Meeting 4/27/23