

**Public Hearing
ARPA Funds
Monday, July 26, 2021**

Notice is hereby given of a Public Hearing to obtain input regarding the Town's acceptance of federal funds earmarked for the Town of Freedom, associated with the American Rescue Plan signed by Congress. Within the State of New Hampshire, the program is called "Local Fiscal Recovery Fund Program". The total estimated award is \$165,724.

This hearing shall be held for the purpose of providing an opportunity for the public to offer comment on the acceptance of the funds. The Board of Selectmen will hold this public hearing on Monday, July 26, 2021 commencing at 7:00 PM at the Freedom Town Office.

Present: Selectmen Leslie Babb, Ernie Day, Melissa Florio; Ellen White, Town Administrator; Jamie Mullen, Alan Fall, Carl Blomquist, Dotty Reed, Daymond Steer, Rob Cunio, and Justin Brooks.

Chairman Babb opened the Public Hearing at 7:08 PM.

Daymond Steer stated that he had just come from Ossipee's public hearing and questioned the process of the public hearing. The Board referred the question to White to answer who responded with the requirement of RSA 31:95-b requiring a public hearing be held for acceptance of unanticipated funds of \$10,000 or more. The purpose of the hearing is to inform the public of the funds available for acceptance and allow for discussion on any questions related to the appropriation.

Steer followed up with a question of how soon a plan is needed for the allocation of the funds? White responded that application has been made by the municipality then funds are distributed in two installments or tranches as they are referred to in the grant documents, and application must be made by August 18 or the funds remain in the State's possession for reallocation as they see fit.

Carl Blomquist questioned what are the requirements of the funding? White responded that the ARPA funds are federal funds distributed to each state which then reallocates to the municipalities therefore foregoing normal federally funds grant requirements. There are specific uses for which the funds can be expended such as to replace lost revenue, fund water, sewer or broadband infrastructure expansion, assist with public-community assistance in covid-related response, and payroll for essential employees to name a few. There is an audit period that must be met in which all documentation for expenditure must be kept but there is no requirement for repayment. Blomquist expressed concern for all the money that is given out by the government and how it will ever be repaid.

Florio added that the funds are not only to assist with the unforeseen expenses and lost revenues but also to look forward to the future and needs that have been presented from the pandemic. Blomquist questioned the town's course for expenditure of the funds? Babb stated that there have been some challenges with staffing of the Police Department so they will be looking at the budget for that as well as in infrastructure improvements that are already in planning stages to see if those costs can be offset, an example being the salt shed at the Highway Garage. Each town is allocated a percentage based on a formula. The city of Rochester will be receiving upwards of \$3 million while Freedom is going to receive \$165,000.

The intention is to proceed with the application process. Babb stated that he wants to read through the documentation so he is familiar with everything. He understands the concern expressed because a lot of the grants come with strings attached especially at the federal level. The Public Safety Building, utilizing federal funds, require payment of prevailing wages be paid thus tripling the actual cost to construct.

Blomquist questioned if acceptance of the funding would open opportunity for immigrants to relocate to the area and questioned if we have the right to refuse if they come? Babb explained that Freedom is absent a shelter or sufficient group housing that could accommodate.

Steer stated that Ossipee will be using their funds to offset the tax rate and finish the reconstruction of their Whittier Covered Bridge. Conway is still determining how their funds will be used. Florio stated that we will continue to collect ideas from other towns.

Day stated that the funds are part of the American Rescue Plan, at the local level referred to as the Local Fiscal Recovery Fund of which Freedom will receive \$165,724.

Alan Fall suggested the Durgin Road bridge as a project for consideration under infrastructure. The project requires a specific style of bridge due to the class of the stream running through which also impacts water quality. This, as well as the salt shed, will be looked into further for eligibility. There is also the option to use the funds to offset the tax rate to make room in the budget to help offset these projects.

Being no further input, Babb closed the public hearing at 7:21 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Ellen White, Town Administrator

Approved by the Board of Selectmen on _____:

Leslie R. Babb

Ernest F. Day, Jr.

Melissa M. Florio