



Edward M. Augustus, Jr.
City Manager

CITY OF WORCESTER

cm2022may19112237

Attachment for Item #

8.41 B

May 24, 2022

TO THE WORCESTER CITY COUNCIL

COUNCILORS:

I submit for your information an amendment to the proposed budget for the City's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

As you know, ARPA was signed in March of 2021 to provide support to state, local, and tribal governments in their efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, repair economic damage caused by pandemic-related conditions, and help governments recover from the financial impacts of pandemic-related closures on revenues. The City of Worcester was designated to receive approximately \$146M in funds, approximately \$110M directly from the U.S. Department of Treasury and approximately \$36M from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in lieu of payments to Worcester County. In July, August, and December of 2021, my Administration submitted budgets, as updated, for the review and consideration of City Council. In each of these budgets and updates, we retained approximately \$10M for future determination of need and purpose.

At this time, I am requesting City Council support to commit this \$10M heretofore unbudgeted allocation to Worcester Public Schools facility improvements, specifically to address Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements to ensure that our educational resources are available for all children and adults regardless of disability.

As you know, in addition to the two major new school construction projects – South High Community School and Doherty Memorial High School – the City is also investing in

multiple school improvement projects. While these Accelerated Repair Program projects have Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) support, the MSBA does not cover the full amount of the project or the cost of any accessory improvements mandated by the triggering of the ADA. ADA improvements are required if a capital investment is more than 30% of the full and fair cash value of a property. In wealthier communities of Greater Boston, this is not often an issue as high land and building values ensure that proposed capital projects are a fraction of the overall property assessment. But in weaker market communities like Worcester, the replacement of a roof or windows or other more targeted investments can sometimes trigger ADA improvements unrelated to the project scope. This type of improvement is important, but a financial hardship and too often proves cost-prohibitive, thereby derailing necessary investments in our educational facilities.

The City's recent investments in a number of schools has triggered these ADA requirements:

- Columbus Park Preparatory Academy
- Gerald Creamer Center
- Lincoln Street School
- Thorndyke Road School
- Challenge/Reach Academy

At a cost of approximately \$2M per school project, these ADA requirements are a significant burden on the City. Under the ARPA Final Rule, funds can be used to increase resources for high-poverty school districts, and ensure equitable and adequate school funding and access to a well-rounded education. Ensuring full physical accessibility for these schools and all of their students is a critical component of equitable and adequate school funding. The Final Rule also states that "...improvements or new construction of schools and other educational facilities or equipment are eligible capital expenditures for disproportionately impacted communities." Worcester falls within this category. We propose to invest these funds in addressing the ADA issues identified in the course of these Accelerated Repair Projects.

If funds remain after these investments, I look to direct the excess toward the Doherty Memorial High School project to ensure that the priorities we identified at the outset but postponed due to budget overruns – enhanced landscaping, athletic facility lighting, solar

panels – are guaranteed as we work to identify additional State and local funds for completion.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Edward M. Augustus, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Edward M. Augustus, Jr.
City Manager