



Eric D. Batista
Acting City Manager

CITY OF WORCESTER

cm2022jun15045903

Attachment for Item #

9.4 B

June 21, 2022

TO THE WORCESTER CITY COUNCIL

COUNCILORS:

The following American Rescue Plan (ARPA) programs and timeline update, as received from Peter Dunn, Chief Development Officer, is transmitted for the information of your honorable Body.

Throughout the year, our Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED) has worked tirelessly alongside many Departments to build a solid foundation to support our ARPA Community Initiatives. Administering this initiative has required extensive capacity building as well as collaboration between multiple Departments and external partners.

I am proud that our ARPA team has implemented such a transparent process that is rooted in equity. Our team is working diligently on crafting impactful and equitable programs, as well as being fully compliant with Federal regulations. At the same time, they are continuing to engage with the community to actively provide outreach and listen to community concerns.

I am confident that our city will be a shining example of how the community can come together with local government to foster an equitable recovery for all.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric D. Batista
Acting City Manager



TO: Eric D. Batista, Acting City Manager

FROM: Peter Dunn, Chief Development Officer

DATE: June 14, 2022

RE: Transmitting Informational Update on American Rescue Plan Act Funds (ARPA)

I write to provide an update on the rollout of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) programs. The Executive Office of Economic Development (EOED) continues to play a lead role in managing Worcester's ARPA Community Initiatives; designed to allocate funding directly to the community. A community driven process was developed and implemented to ensure our shared vision of an equitable recovery. Five (5) committees including the Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board were established and 36 Worcester residents were selected to serve on those committees.

The Ad-Hoc Committees met collectively for an orientation on May 11 at the YWCA of Central MA where the Commissioner of Health & Human Services (HHS) Dr. Matilde Castiel and I presented on federal ARPA requirements and Health Disparity data. Additionally, two members of the Worcester Together Logistics committee gave an initial introduction to the idea of having an equity lens in the process. Committee members expressed enthusiasm to take part in this process and serve the community. In addition, the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) Board had its first two meetings on May 26th and June 15th.

Throughout the year, our staff has worked with different City Departments to include Administration & Finance (A&F), Law, Technical Services, Human Resources, HHS, and Cultural Development to build a grant management infrastructure that can support our Community Initiatives. As you know, administering this unprecedented amount of Federal funds requires both technical and staff capacity building.

Administrative Capacity

The administration of the outlined ARPA Community Initiatives involves the creation of up to 16 programmatic applications; coordination and management of the Ad Hoc Committees / Affordable Housing Trust Fund; community outreach and technical assistance; review and evaluation of hundreds of applications as well as the contracting, monitoring, disbursement and reporting of the funds. EOED has worked closely with Human Resources to post employment opportunities for six new staff that will assist in the administration of the ARPA programs. I am pleased to inform you that three positions, a Community programs manager, a Mental Health and Creative Economy programs manager, and Affordable Housing Trust Fund manager were posted and the evaluation process has started. We will start the interview process as early as next week and we expect to fill these positions by the end of July.

We are continuing to work with Human Resources to post and hire the remaining three ARPA positions who will assist with the Business Assistance and Affordable Housing programs.

Program Development

Under your direction and guidance, I've been working with our internal divisions within EOED to develop program guidelines and Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for the various categories proposed in the ARPA budget. As you know, in January 2022, the U.S. Treasury released the Final Rule for the ARPA state and local funds. The Final Rule document is 437 pages long and our staff have been crafting the RFPs and program parameters in alignment and compliance with the Final Rule. Consistent with our commitment to equitable outcomes, the applications are also prioritizing disproportionately impacted communities. Our Small Business Safety Net program, Small Business Technical Assistance, Affordable Housing Rehabilitation, and Community Projects & Programs are on schedule to release first drafts of RFPs to our Ad Hoc committees by the end of next week for review.

Additionally, our staff are now starting to work closely with HHS and Cultural Development to assist in crafting the RFPs for the Mental Health and Creative Economy programs. Our ARPA planning must align with your Diversity, Equity and Inclusion goals, as well as compliance with Federal regulations. We are confident, that at least one program from the Mental Health and Creative Economy categories will be developed and released late Summer. Since these two funding categories require expert advice and collaboration from different Departments, they are expected to lag behind programs that are developed by our own Department.

Community Outreach & Technical Assistance

While our staff are working diligently on the development of the program RFPs, we have been partnering with the Worcester Together Logistics Committee and community organizations on additional outreach sessions over the last several weeks. So far we've hosted three (3) workshops to provide updates on the ARPA process, preparation guidance for the RFPs and to answer questions. The following is a list of those sessions, which were held both in person and virtually:

- Monday, May 16th at 6:00pm hosted in-person by The Village and Black Families Together at 4 King Street
- Thursday, June 2nd at 5:30pm hosted virtually by the Latino Empowerment Organizing Network with live Spanish translation
- Monday, June 13th at 6:00pm hosted in-person by the Journey Community Church and Latino Education Institute at 25 Belmont Street

Once the RFPs are released, the EOED plans to continue working with community partners to host technical assistance workshops to provide detailed overview of the RFPs and to answer questions. We will again seek to host these in-person and virtually, as well as provide translation services. We greatly appreciate our community partners for the in-kind use of community spaces as well as other outreach and translation support.

Neighborly Software

Federal grant management, specifically to address the negative impacts of the Pandemic is not new to our Department. For example, our COVID-19 Small Business Resiliency grants saw hundreds of applications and we were able to disperse funds to businesses within a very short time frame. Although we were able to disperse funds in a timely manner, the administration of the program could have been more efficient and accessible if we were able to utilize a web based application. With a web based application, business owners, homeowners, and service providers can apply online from anywhere as well as submit back up documentation on the portal. Paper applications will also be available to download off the City Website to be submitted to City staff in person or via email.

On May 17, we executed a Service agreement with Benevate Inc. d/b/a Neighborly Software to integrate our ARPA programs into a web based application system, as well as to provide us with enhanced project management and work flow capabilities. The implementation phase of the project began and we expect to launch this new feature by the end of the summer.

Timeline

Phase I of program releases include Business Safety Net, Small Business Technical Assistance, Community Programs/Projects, and Affordable Housing.

Phase II of the program releases will include the Mental Health and Creative Economy programs. Phase II is anticipated to be released late Summer.

Updated Phase I Timeline:

- Week of June 20th – 1st draft of RFPs sent to respective Ad Hoc committees for review.
- End of June / Early July – Ad Hoc Committees will meet to review RFPs.
- Mid / Late July – Phase I programs finalized and released to the public.
- August – Technical Assistance workshops held throughout the community.
- End of August – Online applications open, public can apply on City Website via Neighborly portal

We look forward to the continued work ahead, but wanted to ensure we were also providing this communication as a status update to the City Council and the community.

Sincerely,

Peter Dunn
Chief Development Officer