

American Rescue Plan Advisory Committee Meeting

Minutes

April 12, 2022

ARPA Committee Members in attendance: Bill Wade, Chair; Ben Herman, Vice Chair; Cindy Enos-Martinez, Diane Schwenke, Gary Schroen, Estrella Ruiz, Kay Ramachandran, Laurel Cole, Linda Taylor, Raul De Villegas Decker, William Findlay

ARPA Committee Councilmembers: Abe Herman, Dennis Simpson, Randall Reitz

City Staff: Greg Caton, City Manager; Crystal Madrigal, Grant Administrator; Scott Rust, Deputy Finance Director; Johnny McFarland, Asst. to the City Manager; Isabella Vaz, Communications Specialist

The Chair let the committee know that an unsolicited childcare proposal had been sent to staff as well as the Chair and Vice Chair and encouraged committee members to review.

Subcommittee Group Updates

Childcare

Diane Schwenke indicated they met for a short meeting. After analyzing the issue throughout the region, the issue they identified was primarily around staffing, as opposed to facility availability. Given that this is the major barrier and Mesa County already has a strong plan to address childcare, they feel it is in the best interest of the committee to focus on the other two areas (housing, homelessness).

The chair indicated that this information is precisely what they hoped the committee would find but encouraged the group to evaluate the proposal that had been submitted. There was additional discussion on the merits of the proposal, but the committee was not prepared to discuss it in-depth at the time.

There was also a process discussion regarding when and whether the committee should begin evaluating unsolicited proposals.

Housing

The Vice Chair met with Raul, Bill, and Laurel Cole to discuss housing in their subcommittee group. The group focused more on workforce housing as opposed to transitional. They found that the institutional infrastructure, including the City's capacity is not in place yet to evaluate all opportunities. They concluded that the best opportunity is to look for partnerships and find ways to leverage additional money from partners such as the Housing Authority, existing developers, Habitat for Humanity, or to find city-owned land that can be sold for development of housing.

Laurel Cole provided a summary of Habitat for Humanity's work in the region and what their current and future plans are for housing development. Several questions were asked, including whether Habitat has the capability to refocus efforts on multi-family as opposed to single-family housing. Other questions focused on what Habitat's long-term capacity would be if they received additional funding, including whether they could increase the number of homes built per year. One of the limiting factors for Habitat once they fill the subdivision they currently own is securing future land for additional projects.

Raul De-Villegas Decker indicated he had a meeting set up with Hilltop, but it has been pushed until after the ARPA Committee meeting was scheduled. He will provide updates to the committee after this meeting. The goal is to identify whether there is a partnership opportunity with Hilltop to leverage public and private funds.

Additional discussion on housing focused largely on available options for using funds to purchase land. If the land is secured, possibly through a land bank option, it would eliminate that barrier to affordable housing developers.

Greg Caton provided some staff perspective, that the 12 goals and strategies outlined in the City plans in the near and long-term should not be a barrier to the committee. If the committee would prefer to act on a longer-term strategy such as securing land or forming a land bank, that could be done.

Homelessness

Bill Wade, Chair, indicated that the homelessness subgroup met and found that the two primary issues facing the region are homelessness and vagrancy. They found that many individuals are not homeless per say but make money panhandling. They found the total sheltered/unsheltered population based on the latest point-in-time count was between 600 and 700 people.

The subgroup felt that because this is a finite problem, it can be addressed potentially through providing funding to existing homelessness nonprofits such as Catholic Charities and HomewardBound. They feel this should be explored in greater detail and the committee should look at larger contributions.

Process

The Chair asked if Council wants the committee to identify specific projects that would be a good fit to recommend funding for. Councilmember Reitz agreed, indicating it would be helpful to hear from the community.

There was some concern amongst members that the downside of broadly accepting proposals from the community could create conditions where the organizations submitting proposals have a high expectation of receiving funding, but City Council could ultimately choose not to accept the proposals recommended by the ARPA Committee. It was suggested that it might be useful for the Committee to identify 3-5 solid projects to recommend but through a narrowed scope, including the possibility of a matrix or rubric by which to compare proposals with the objectives of the committee.

Councilmember Simpson also suggested that proposals are evaluated jointly with City staff who have the expertise to identify whether a project is realistically feasible to pursue.

The committee discussed whether there was consensus on pursuing housing and homelessness as the narrow focus areas. There was some disagreement from members who feel the committee is leaving a number of projects off the table. It may be premature to move too quickly on a housing/homelessness focus.

The Chair suggested as a compromise that the committee spend the next month evaluating other potential funding areas and the committee can vote whether to narrow their focus or entertain other policy areas at their May meeting.

A vote was held on whether the committee should lockdown their topics of focus at today's meeting, it lost 4 to 6. So, it was agreed that the committee would allow members to continue evaluating other options understanding that a vote on what areas to focus the Committee's attention would be held at the May meeting.

The subgroups on housing and homelessness would continue to meet in the interim, and members of the childcare subgroup should let the Chair know which subgroup they would like to join.

Councilmember Reitz asked that the committee decide on whether meetings should continue to be recorded. The general consensus is that the meetings should not be recorded out of concern that the discussions had in the Committee should be open and honest, and given that many members represent other organizations, it could create issues in the future. There was no official motion to vote on the issue. It was also suggested that today's meeting be deleted. There was no vote on this issue. Councilmember Simpson voiced concerns about ending meeting recordings, citing that the public should be able to view these meetings given that it is an open public meeting.

Adjourn