

Isle La Motte ARPA Committee Meeting
Regular Meeting
10 January 2024
6:30 pm
Town Office at Isle La Motte School and Zoom

In Attendance : Steve Stata, Carol Stata, Mary LaBrecque, Peter Brzozowy, Barbara Callahan, Mark Dostaler, Debbie Langlois, and Vicky Buswell (via Zoom)

1. The meeting was called to order at 6:34 pm by ARPA Committee Chair Steve Stata.

2. Approve Meeting Minutes of 10/25/2023: A motion was made by Peter Brzozowy to accept the meeting minutes of 10/25, seconded by Carol Stata. All in favor.

3. Discuss/Act on Town Survey as related to ARPA, Discuss/Act on other possible ideas for funding : Chair Stata passed out the survey results from the Planning Commission and ARPA committee survey along with a copy of the comments from the ARPA question. The ranking of the results : ComputerUpgrades/Security, Matching Grant Funds, Improve Record Keeping Safety and Security, Digitizing Land Records, Capital Improvements. He also shared that there were 31 responses in which the respondent made a change to the order of the prioritization on the survey question (out of 104 total respondents), and it was interpreted by Emily (from NWRPC) that these were the only valid responses. Chair Stata felt that a downside of the question presented in this manner is that if an individual agreed that the order of items presented was prioritized according to how they would vote, and did not make a change, that result was not counted in the survey results. Peter Brzozowy felt discussion was needed but wasn't sure how to go about it. The fact that $\frac{2}{3}$ of the survey takers did not change the priority of the individual items, there is no way to know if the question was omitted by the survey taker or they agreed with the priority. There was discussion around the order of the priorities and whether it could be determined whether any of the excluded results could somehow be "validated" however as Peter Brzozowy pointed out, this decision was made by the designers of the survey, and the results are the same whether only 31 responses were included or all 104 results were used. Carol Stata pointed out that no assumptions can be made, you have to use the data. Mark Dostaler questioned if any money had been earmarked for any of these priorities. Mary LaBrecque replied that last year the town voted to use \$50,000 from the ARPA money to start the digitization project and that so far around \$5,000 had been used to upgrade computer systems in the office. Steve Stata also stated that matching grant money is voted on every year. There was further discussion about the server and the storage of data, and the fact that the \$50,000 wasn't going to be enough money to complete the whole project. Mark Dostaler asked if digitization of records was required by state statute, Steve Stata responded that it was not yet required. Mark Dostaler inquired if grants were available, Mary LaBrecque responded that there were grants available during COVID, but wasn't sure if there was anything available currently. Peter Brzozowy commented that he felt we should include the computer upgrades/security in our recommendations. Steve Stata asked if anyone had any other ideas for uses of the ARPA money. Mary LaBrecque replied that she had been hearing about a generator. There was some discussion

about how generators were obtained during the ice storm in 1998. Steve Stata replied that the National Guard supplied the town with 4 generators. Some time after that, the town was gifted a very large generator, however the cost to implement that was believed to be prohibitive (over \$100,000). He also discussed the maintenance costs for generators. Steve Stata feels that if we have an emergency to the extent we need a generator we will be able to obtain resources from the National Guard or other agency.

Steve Stata asked for comments on the 5 priorities listed in the survey. Peter Brzozowy said that he felt that the survey speaks for itself. Mark Dostaler felt that the server needed to come next. Peter Brzozowy recalled that the previous Town Clerk (S. Mank) had received a proposal from Rural Solutions. Mark Dostaler mentioned that we would need to do regular computer upgrades, and Mary LaBrecque responded that just replacing the computers is not a large expense. Steve Stata also discussed developing a maintenance plan, and Peter Brzozowy thought much of this was part of the original plan developed by Steve Mank. Steve Stata commented that he believes that by state statute all paper records need to be kept forever. Steve Stata questioned the group as far as using the decision tree, or do we feel the results of the survey are enough to make our final recommendation. Mark Dostaler felt that using some of the money to pay the match for grants would allow the town to use more money for the remainder of the items on the list. Mary LaBrecque reminded him that the ARPA money has to be committed by the end of 2024, and there can be a lag time of over a year from the time grants are applied for and the actual work is completed and paid for. Carol Stata thought that because of this maybe we should recommend the money be used for three items : Computer Upgrades/Security, Digitizing Land Records, and Improve Record Keeping and Security. Peter Brzozowy thought that we don't know how much the above will cost, but we do know that there will be additional costs to the taxpayers in the future. There was a brief discussion about a walk in vault, however costs have been explored in the past and the estimated cost was estimated to be over 100K.

There was discussion about how to address the comments that were received with specific suggestions for use of the ARPA funds. Steve Stata commented that the decision tree was developed to evaluate these ideas. There was some discussion about not knowing the exact costs of any of the improvements, and that none of them are a "one and done" deal. Steve Stata recommends that the Select Board start with Computer Upgrades/Security and go down the list while allocating the money.

Peter Brzozowy commented that he had noted a suggestion that \$15,000 be donated to the Isle La Motte fire department, and committee members felt it was a fair request. He further commented that this expenditure would be of benefit to the entire community. Carol Stata reminded the group that we have to keep in mind what our role is and that the Select Board has the right to make the final decision regarding the use of the money. She thought that pointing out the comments to the Select Board along with our recommendation is the correct course to take. Steve Stata stated that because we are claiming to be data driven and that we should focus on our recommendation (data from the survey) in our letter to the Select Board. However, in the Town Report he recommends discussing the specific comments from the survey, although the committee's recommendation remains from the data. Barbara Callahan inquired why we didn't give the public the results of the survey, Steve responded that it isn't our data to give out,

it belongs to the Planning Commission, however he thought the data would be available to any who requested it.

Steve inquired if the committee was in agreement to recommend the first item on the committee to the Select Board. All agreed.

2. Discuss/Act on message for Town Report,/Discuss/act on schedule of follow up meetings :

Steve Stata presented a draft of the documents for both the Select Board and the Town Report. The Town Report must be at the printers by 29 January, and Steve Stata committed to having our report completed by 25 January. He had also committed to having an update to the Select Board at their 17 January meeting. There was discussion about whether emailing documents for editing purposes was within the scope of the Open Meeting Law. Steve was concerned about sending the Town Report document before the Select Board receives our final recommendation. Carol Stata felt one more meeting before the Select Board meeting on 17 January would resolve the timing and hopefully complete the committee's work. There was further discussion about the appropriateness of sending documents by Google Docs for review, and if the recommendation to the Select Board would not be formally presented at the meeting on 17 January. It was agreed to schedule a meeting for 16 January at 6:30 pm. Peter Brzozowy volunteered to read the recommendation into the record, there was some discussion about what, if any action to take. Steve outlined the changes he had made to

Motion to adjourn made by Peter Brzozowy at 8:32 pm, seconded by Carol Stata. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary LaBrecque