



City of Takoma Park

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

FAQs

Virtual Community Meeting

January 18, 2022

Q1: If you close in the atrium, can we get a large open community space for events where the atrium opening was?

A: The proposed renovation project would fill in the floor between the first and second levels. That area is now open and not useable. The proposed project would add a floor creating useable space.

Q2: Beyond projects, a chunk of ARPA funds was transferred to the City government to replace revenue shortfalls, correct? Can you describe what specifically caused revenue shortfalls in the first part of the pandemic, and is it continuing (since the pandemic is continuing)?

A: Generally, the economic effects of the pandemic caused a revenue shortfall compared to the pre-pandemic period. Using ARPA funds to replace lost revenue is an eligible expenditure. No ARPA funds have been transferred. The City will soon be going through its budgeting process, which should hopefully help answer this question in more detail.

Q3: The Deputy City Manager referenced proposals that staff received that led to the proposal for \$1.2 M for social services partnerships. Are those proposals listed somewhere where we can see them, and if not, can they be made public in some manner?

A: All of the proposals the City received and staff proposed can be found at this link: https://documents.takomaparkmd.gov/initiatives/projectdirectory/ARPA/ARPAProposals_SummaryReport_1.12.22.pdf.

Q4: We need more than two mental health counselors. We need a supportive network for people, not just one or two.

A: The first step is to have those counselors connect people with services. So right now, the way it works, is we respond to a call for service and the police department is the frontline response. If a person is in crisis, they would be triaged. We don't want triage; what we want is to have mental health counselors respond out, identify people in need, and then connect them with those services. We are very hopeful that, at the County level, services are expanded. Normally these levels of services would be provided at a County level. We don't have a Health and Human Services function here in the City, but we felt that there was such a critical need right now, that having mental health counselors would start us down that road. It is something that we could do and not wait for the County. The City will not only respond to a call for service but also help individuals to connect with other services.

Q5: I know the young people who have lost time in school and are dealing with a lot of anxiety, not only need mental health support but also need academic tutoring. Is there a way to have a network of tutors?

A: The recreation department does offer a few programs with an academic aspect in our after-school program. We actually have volunteers that come in and assist young people with homework. The Library does have a host of online databases that are really helpful, including things like tumble books which are specifically aimed at school-aged children. There are read-along tools to help improve reading skills. We have several other databases including Test Prep software. Staff are more than happy to help people actually go over these databases and learn how to use them. We have a computer lab here as well the computer center where people can access those services if they don't have computers at home. We also have a math tutor, although currently on a brief hiatus due to the pandemic. The City plans to bring the tutor back onsite as soon as we can safely do so. If the City uses ARPA funds for the library expansion, this will allow us to offer more support for youth from the library facility. Investments in the recreation center , as well as the recreation program scholarships, will also go towards youth support.

Q6: How do we know how much is needed in each category of proposed projects and whether we are covering urgent needs?

A: We have received feedback from the community through the use of the ARPA-specific email, through your Ward representatives, the Mayor, and staff. From that, we investigated and reviewed proposed projects to ensure alignment with Council priorities. We also considered long-term needs, trying to make sure that the projects are sustainable post-pandemic. The City received half of the grant funds in July 2021. The City could have developed a spending plan very quickly. However, we delayed until now so that we had time to develop a very thoughtful plan that took into account a lot of the ideas that came forward. Our staff and our Council are very in touch with resident needs and so when our departments had ideas and Council had ideas, we know that that emerges out of a clear sense of need.

Q7: How are the library and atrium projects prioritized versus trying to address urgent community needs right now?

A: The City wants to invest in projects that would benefit the community beyond 2026. These two projects, in particular, provide spaces where we can serve residents better and residents can connect with the government and obtain the services that they need. There is a misnomer that this is only a dispatch area. The dispatch area is really more like a large closet. Multiple functions will be available if we close in this space. We do not have adequate space in the community center. The atrium project will enable the City to house mental health counselors and it would also create a private interview room where residents can talk to a counselor in a private area. Right now we only have one room to do that. A lot of times we're talking to residents in the open atrium area and the sound carries all the way up to the third floor. There is not a confidential area in which residents can have a conversation related to a mental health crisis. This project will also create office space and more service windows where the public can come and get services. This project will also include ADA improvements to bathrooms. This is a critical infrastructure project that we absolutely need to get done, not just for the police department but for the community center.

The City needs to continue to make sure our facilities are accessible, provide employees adequate space, and provide the public adequate space to use the facilities. The Library expansion and Atrium Renovation projects will meet public needs, provide public services and serve as a gathering place for community residents. The Library is a space where the City can serve residents better. We are at a point in the planning and design process where we're close to plans being completed and permitting is close to done. Revisiting the design at this point would result in increased costs. The

current design has emerged out of a 7-year community engagement process. Images of the future building can be viewed on the City's website.

Q8: Which proposals in the list of proposals were put forward by residents, individuals, or organizations?

A: The list of proposals reflects a mix of responses. At times, residents submitted ideas that actually overlapped with what Department heads or Councilmembers had been thinking. The City did not have any intent to publish the names of individuals or entities that provided a certain concept. The City looked at concepts in total, ranked and reviewed them to arrive at the recommended spending plan. We made a point to set aside pots of money that we hope to make available to individual organizations as well, such as the Small Business grants and potentially the \$1.2 million for social services. All eligible proposals were included as concepts and scored. Projects were only excluded from scoring if they weren't eligible based on ARPA requirements. For example, we did receive a suggestion for a climate resiliency authority. However, that would be an indirect project and it really didn't fit well within the ARPA eligibility buckets. As a result, we decided to remove that project.

Q9: Was there a similar process for funding from the CARES Act?

A: Cares funding worked a little bit differently in that it was a reimbursement. Funds were used primarily for previous expenditures on personal protective equipment, as well as for emergency assistance to residents and businesses.

Q10: Does the spending plan include funding for school infrastructure?

A: The City did not score a project concept specifically related to school infrastructure.

Q11: The contingency amount seems low.

A: The contingency amount is just over 8% of the total funding amount that we received. Around 10% is generally a good rule of thumb as noted by the Government Finance Officers Association. The City tried to make project estimates as accurate as possible, but it is possible that those could shift. What's going to be an important part of this process is the annual review process for the 5-year ARPA spending plan. If there is another COVID-19 surge or there are unforeseen circumstances that come up, the City will be able to readjust budget amounts and reprioritize projects if needed.

Q12: Low- and moderate-income residents have a wide variety of needs. Have you considered making a direct payment to such households and letting them decide what to use that money for?

A: We did certainly consider that type of program. We scored direct cash assistance programs as well as a guaranteed income program which did not score as high as others. However, we can discuss during the council work sessions as there are different ways to design those types of programs. It may be that there's interest in reviving those two ideas and so over the next couple of weeks, we can certainly talk about what would be a good amount or how a project like that might be designed. Part of the upcoming Council discussion will be about whether direct assistance programs should supplant other projects.

Q13: Can we hear more about what exactly the \$1 million for the Maple Avenue project will pay for? Can you comment on the engagement of Maple Avenue apartment residents in designing this?

A: The Complete Street project intends to strengthen transportation connections and prioritize pedestrian safety, bicyclists' safety, and the safety of other transit users. We currently have 30% of the design completed from Sligo to Carroll Avenue. With \$1 million, we will get to 100% design as well as construction. The City was the beneficiary of a Council of Governments-related grant that assisted with getting to that 30% design. A design group was hired to develop the design and do survey work. They held a number of zoom meetings to serve the community. The current 30% designs are on the City's website.

Q14: What is the average grant amount for small businesses?

A: It depends on how we prioritize the businesses for grants. There were some small businesses that did not have access to grants under the CARES Act or any other COVID-19 relief funding. We want to make sure that those businesses that did not have access to those funds have the ability to obtain ARPA funds, as well as our small businesses that aren't served by our business associations. We've also heard from the business community that some of the small businesses are recovering and there isn't a need as much as there was during the height of the pandemic.

Q15: Can you provide some insight about the proposals that involve hiring staff? Is there any assurance that these positions will be cut at the end of the ARPA funding period or how the City would support them afterward?

A: We do have three positions that are supported with ARPA funding. In addition to the ARPA Manager, we have a payroll and accounting specialist who's going to support the ARPA Manager directly in terms of the reporting of expenditures back to the Federal grantor. We're also hiring an IT software analyst. A large part of standing up new programs is being able to track what we're doing. We want to make sure that our IT systems are consolidated well and are integrated. The City had a lot of needs in the software area, even before the pandemic and before ARPA came along. The City has been very clear that ARPA-related staff will be holding temporary positions ending in 2026. For right now we're looking for a temporary expansion of capacity so that we can implement the \$17.4 million grant. This is a historic amount of money for the City and so we had to have some capacity expansion to be able to do this work.

Q16: How much revenue has the City lost and how does that work under ARPA?

A: Previously it seemed like the City would need to calculate revenue loss. With the new Final Rule, the City has the option to take a standard allowance of \$10 million to address any loss of revenue during the pandemic. There are less restrictions on how the standard allowance is expended. Revenue replacement funds can be used on projects that are traditional services provided by the government. The standard allowance provides more flexibility in regard to the types of projects that can be funded.