



# TOWN OF OLD SAYBROOK

Office of the Board of Selectmen

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302 Main Street • Old Saybrook, Connecticut 06475

Telephone (860) 395-3123 • FAX (860) 395-3125

## AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) AD HOC COMMITTEE

### MEETING MINUTES

### HYBRID MEETING

Tuesday, March 8, 2022

5:00 p.m.

Old Saybrook Town Hall – First-floor Conference Room

To access a recording of this meeting: : <https://youtu.be/mtPlnuU7TmA>

#### I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:05 p.m. by the chair, Mr. Carlson.

Members Present: Bruce Carlson (Chair), Susan Esty (Vice-chair), Maureen Zavatone (Secretary), Judy Sullivan, Kacie Hand, Brad Thorpe, Elizabeth McEvily and Kristen Roberts.

Others Present: Carl Fortuna, Heather McNeil, Susan Consoli, Kathy Bai, Lisa Castro, Jennifer Donahue, Dennis Tulimieri, Maryam Elahi.

#### II. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no comments from members of the public.

#### III. MINUTES

The minutes from the February 8 meeting were reviewed. A **MOTION** was made by Ms. Esty and seconded by Ms. McEvily to accept the minutes as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

#### IV. GUEST SPEAKERS

Mr. Carlson gave a short recap of the committee's work noting that its goal was to perfect, not reinvent, the wheel and, to that end, guest experts in town are being asked to share their views as to the impact of the pandemic and how to use the ARPA funds as well as how to leverage other funding through that use. Mr. Carlson noted that the committee has heard about housing and the focus of this forum would be on mental health particularly as it relates to youth and seniors. The guests were introduced:

Heather McNeil, director of Old Saybrook Youth & Family Services; Susan Consoli, Old Saybrook's social services coordinator and agent for the elderly; Kathy Bai, director of pupil and professional services for the Old Saybrook Public Schools; and Lisa Castro, guidance counselor at Old Saybrook Middle School and a member of the Youth & Family Services Commission.

Ms. McNeil shared some background information about the mental health staff resources at YFS and the number of sessions they provide annually as well as statistics related to teen depression, suicide and substance abuse. She asked the committee to consider funding for the following: 1) A part-time bilingual clinician for 50 weeks x \$40/hr x 10hours x 2 years at \$40,000; 2) a grant writer; 3) a fee-for-service clinician for 10 hours/month at \$40,000; 4) funds to administer the SEARCH survey to grades 7-12 and a report evaluator at \$6-8,000.

Ms. Consoli reported that more than 2,000 Old Saybrook residents receive some form of state aid and that over 55% of those on energy assistance are elderly. Two hundred families were added to social services in the past year. With a goal of making families whole so that they could then move back to a maintenance mode she asked for \$100,000 to continue funding previously provided through the state that is being discontinued such as UniteCT. She also asked for \$80,000 to build an outdoor pavilion at the senior housing complex on Sheffield Street to provide a safer and larger gathering space for seniors throughout the community to congregate.

Extensive discussion followed with many committee members asking for clarification on a number of issues. Highlights included:

- Old Saybrook Cares has remaining funding that could be used to help with some of the issues discussed. Ms. Roberts and Ms. Zavatone will follow-up on this.
- Seven different languages are spoken by families in the school district – mostly related to Spanish and Portuguese. This causes alienation for these families and parentification of children.
- Social services continues to work with Work Force Alliance to help people get work and to access training through Middlesex Community College.
- Health and wellness components such as nutrition advice, healthy cooking on a food stamp diet and backyard gardening assistance will continue to be a focus.
- Lack of ability to hold fundraisers during the pandemic has depleted the fuel fund. Higher fuel prices will make this issue more acute.
- Childcare resources continue to be strained.
- Though many of the issues discussed have roots in systemic problems, the pandemic has widened the divide for families who already were not on solid financial ground and/or had jobs in the service industry.

Committee members noted that they appreciated the efforts of YFS staff to be conservative with their requests for funding but also asked them to dream big if there

were any ideas with a large-scale impact that they might want to consider and come back to the committee with.

**V. OLD BUSINESS**

No old business was discussed.

**VI. NEW BUSINESS**

Mr. Carlson noted that Ms. Sullivan and Susie Beckman, the town's former executive director for the Economic Development Commission, have agreed to attend the next meeting to speak about small businesses in the area.

**VII. COMMENTS FROM THE COMMITTEE**

There were no additional comments from committee members.

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Thorpe made a **MOTION** to adjourn at 6:15 p.m. Ms. Zavatone seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

*The next meeting of the committee will be held on Tuesday, March 22, 2022 at 5:00 p.m. in the Town Hall first-floor conference room.*

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Donahue