

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
RTM HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
AUGUST 23, 2021**

The RTM Health and Human Services Committee meet on August 23, 2021 at 7:00pm via Zoom. Attendees were as follows:

RTM Members – Jessica Bram, Committee Chair, Andrew Colabella, Arlene Gertzoff, Karen Kramer, Jack Klinge, Kristin Schneeman, Lauren Soloff and Chris Tait

Other Town Employees – Elaine Daignault, Director of the Health and Human Services Department, and Steve Smith, Westport Building Inspector

The first order of business was to discuss a request of the Director of Health and Human Services to approve an appropriation in the amount of \$75,000 for architectural services and the environmental evaluation of asbestos and lead at the Gillespie Center. Although at the time of the meeting the request had not yet been presented to the Board of Finance, HHS wanted to provide the committee with background information. The request will go before the RTM again, if approved by the Board of Finance at its September 1, 2021 meeting.

Elaine Daignault presented the request, explaining that Westport previously was granted a \$500,000 Department of Housing grant for improvement to the Gillespie Center as part of a special round of COVID-19 Cares Act funding via a previously approved the Small Cities Grant. The grant was awarded for the purpose of preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the shelter environment. The proposed project incorporates a renovation to the shelter that will allow safe distancing, better access to the food pantry and laundry area, and separate office space for staff to meet with clients. The \$75,000 request will specifically cover the continuation of pre-project activities, including funding for the architect's contract and a preliminary environmental assessment of the building. She explained that these funds are eligible for reimbursement through the previously approved grant.

The committee discussed the overall usage of the Gillespie Center which presently has ten occupied beds for men (15 before Covid), and two occupied beds for women (4 before Covid). In addition, there are cots available for the community room to shelter additional individuals in the cold weather. Last year eighty-eight people received shelter at the center. The Gillespie Center also serves approximately 2100 meals a year to those in need, and houses the food pantry which distributes approximately 1400 bags of nonperishable food annually.

Although this item will return to the RTM for review following Board of Finance approval, the Committee did vote on the matter. Jack Klinge made a motion to approve, and Kristin Schneeman seconded. The Committee voted unanimously to support the request. (Note that although Lauren Soloff is a board member of Homes with Hope, it was determined that she need not recuse herself from this vote.)

Following the vote, Elaine Daignault presented the Committee with an outline of the funds that the Health and Human Services Department anticipated requesting from the town as part of the allocation of the \$8 million American Rescue Plan funds received by Westport. The future request may include the following: \$15,000 for a memo of understanding with the VNA to provide support services to homebound seniors as a stop gap measure until WWHD is back up and running; \$50,000 for financial assistance for counseling services and enhanced access to mental health supports through non-profit partnerships (Positive Directions, Liberation Programs, Mentor Program, prevention efforts); \$75,000 to provide short-term emergency assistance funds to benefit income-eligible residents experiencing housing insecurity and financial hardship due to COVID-19 related loss of income; \$40,000 for enhanced public transportation for lower-income individuals (local shopping loop); \$150,000 for improvements to Project Return; and \$55,000 for an Affordable Housing Administrator. The total anticipated request is \$385,000.

The Board of Finance and the RTM will review the allocation of the American Rescue Plan funds once the Board of Selectmen receives public input and makes a final recommendation.

Following our discussion of ARPA funds, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by:

Lauren Soloff, RTM District 9