

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA)

Strategic Planning Meeting

October 7, 2021

Third Floor Boardroom, Old Lee County Courthouse
112 E Second St, Dixon, IL 61021

Meeting called to order at 9:00 by Executive Committee Chair Bob Olson

Member Roll Call: Chair Bob Olson, Jim Schielein, John Nicholson, Chris Norberg, and Rick Humphrey

County Officials: Charley Boonstra (State's Attorney) and John Simonton (Sheriff)

Advisory Members: Sara Leisner (ARPA Grant Coordinator), Patty Rudolphi (ARPA Internal Control and Separation of Duties), Paul Rudolphi (Chief Deputy in the Treasurer's Office), Kevin Lalley (EMA), and Wendy Ryerson (Administrator).

County Board Members, Department Heads, and Employees present: Mike Koppien, Lirim Mimini, Marilyn Shipper, Dave Bally, Marvin Williams, Jack Skrogstad, Mike Zeman, Bill Palen, and Tom Kitson (County Board Members), Paula Meyer (Treasurer), Dee Duffy (9:00-10:30), Greg Saunders (Maintenance Supervisor), Teri Zinke (Animal Control), Angel Lillpop (Director of Fiscal Services/Lee County Health Department).

Motion by Rick Humphrey: To approve the minutes from the August 12, 2021, American Rescue Plan Act Committee Meeting.

Second by John Nicholson: Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

Strategic Planning Session:

Sara Leisner, ARPA Grant Coordinator, gave attendees an overview of the ARPA grant. A total of \$6,622,748 will be distributed to Lee County in two payments of \$3,311,374 each. Eligible expenses are categorized in five broad categories:

- 1) Support the Public Health response. Services that respond to, mitigate, or prevent the spread of COVID-19; behavioral healthcare & substance abuse services; payroll & covered benefits of public health, healthcare, human services & public safety staff to the extent they work on COVID-19 response.
- 2) Address negative economic impacts. Assistance to workers, families, and households; support small businesses impacted by COVID-19; speed the recovery of impacted industries (tourism/travel/hospitality); Rebuild public sector capacity; COVID-19 mitigation/prevention/response.
- 3) Replace public sector revenue loss. At this time, Lee County has no revenue loss, therefore no funds are available for use in the category.
- 4) Premium pay for essential workers. Provide premium pay for essential workers such as grocery, healthcare, education, food service, childcare, sanitation, transit, government, truck drivers, farm workers, food production facilities, and warehouse workers.
- 5) Water & sewer infrastructure and broadband infrastructure.

Sara led attendees through proposed projects in each of the 5 categories. The proposed projects came from formal funding requests, informal discussions, and ARPA webinars.

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Attendees used the “SWOT” analysis to identify internal “Strengths” and “Weaknesses”, and external “Opportunities” and “Threats” for each project. The following is a summary of the discussion:

I. Responding to the Public Health Emergency

COVID response, mitigation & prevention. Vaccination programs, medical care, testing, contact tracing, support for isolation/quarantine, supports for vulnerable populations to access medical/public health services, public health surveillance (monitoring trends, etc.), enforcement of public health orders, public communication efforts, enhancement to healthcare capacity, purchases of PPE, enhancements in public health data systems, prevention and mitigation in congregate living facilities (nursing homes, incarceration facilities, homeless shelters, group living facilities) and schools these include improvements to ventilation, adaptations & expansion to accommodate social distancing, COVID mitigation etc., cash or in-kind transfers, lottery programs or other incentives for vaccinated individuals.

Mental health & substance abuse services for individuals experiencing trauma exacerbated by the pandemic such as: community mental health & substance abuse disorder programs that deliver evidence-based psychotherapy, crisis support, medications for opioid use disorder/recovery/support, trauma recovery services for crime victims

1. Additional equipment needed by local fire departments for EMT's. Request from Dixon Rural Fire for Lucas 3 Compression Device used for CPR. They currently have one and need a second so that both ambulances have the device on board.

Strength: Improve health/safety for residents; assist all fire departments

Weakness: They have their own ARPA funds;

Opportunity: Collaboration with City of Dixon;

Threat: Should allocate \$ to ALL fire departments; some equipment may require specialized training; don't want to buy equipment that is not used for lack of experience

2. Improvements to public buildings for social distancing/spacing/expanding office spaces to accommodate social distancing

Strength: allows for more social distancing, mitigating the spread of COVID

Weakness: COVID # are dropping; is this really needed

Opportunity: Replace outdated office furniture, expand office spaces, and incorporate more barriers/partitions to help mitigate the spread of COVID

Threat: COVID guidelines are always changing; may not be needed in future

3. Allocation of funds to counseling & mental health providers for mental health & substance abuse programs. Covering co-pays, deductibles and any out-of-pocket expenses for those who need the services, yet do not have the funds to pay for services. Offering a grant program of sorts for these agencies to apply for a certain amount of funding, then use funds to cover services for those uninsured or underinsured.

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Strength: Providing access to services that may not be accessible or affordable to County residents for needed services

Weakness: May be other funding for this

Opportunity: Promote a healthier community, assist those who do not have the funds to access these services; building a working relationship with local service providers; utilize existing service providers to allocate funding to those that need mental health services.

Threat: Administration – relying on outside agency to ensure the funds are used within the guidelines and reported to Lee County in a timely manner.

4. HVAC/Ventilation Upgrades to Lee County public buildings to mitigate COVID (OR any other capital improvement for Lee County buildings)

Strength: Improve ventilation in public buildings to mitigate the spread of COVID; upgrade older HVAC systems to a more efficient system.

Weakness: Large projects which could consume significant ARPA resources, minimizing the ability to allocate resources to other priorities.

Opportunity: Potential for COM-ED incentives, rebates.

Threat:

5. Technology improvements to the County Board meeting rooms, including audio/video equipment, board agenda/minutes organizational software, and tablets or laptops for Board member participation

Strength: Allows for remote participation of public meetings for members of the public, county board members, and county staff by improving the audio/video equipment, and providing a software tool for managing meeting presentations and dissemination of agenda's and other relevant documents.

Weakness: Learning curve of using new technology/processes for Board members, staff and public.

Opportunity: Opportunity to replace the existing, failing audio system in the Board meeting rooms.

Threat:

6. County wide notification system for updates on COVID, vaccine clinics & other related emergency management information. (EMA request for Code RED county-wide alert system)

Strength: Allows residents to register for the system to obtain immediate updates on COVID and other emergency related information.

Weakness:

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Opportunity: Communicate with those who may not regularly receive or have access to a system that provides updates on COVID. Can be used for broader emergency notifications beyond COVID.

Threat: Requires registration by residents. Residents may not update changes to their contact information to receive updates.

7. ROE request for funding for NEXUS staff in school districts. Assists students by supporting the whole family's social-emotional needs, school wellness, and overall family wellbeing, all while assisting the students in successful completion of their studies.

Strength: Utilize the ROE infrastructure to target funding to at-risk students with minimal administration by Lee County. Providing needed support and services to students and families within the County

Weakness:

Opportunity: Provide at-risk students the assistance they need to successfully attend school & graduate.

Threat: Administration – relying on ROE to ensure the funds are used within the guidelines and reported to Lee County in a timely manner.

8. Payroll reimbursement for Lee County employees that spend much of their time mitigating/responding to COVID. (Health Department, EMA, County janitorial staff wages & benefits)

Strength: Meets the clear intent of ARPA

Weakness: Relies on judgement of supervisors to determine the amount of time employees spend to mitigate/respond to COVID; temporary funding source only covering period of COVID mitigation.

Opportunity: Reallocate salary/benefit expense to other critical county needs.

Threat:

9. Partner with KSB, LCHD, Sinnissippi, ROE, Lee County Schools, and SVCC to provide physical, dental, and mental healthcare to students via a mobile clinic.

Strength: Provide healthcare to students that may not be able to afford it; Expense is divided among all partners.

Weaknesses:

Opportunity: Partnership with other local agencies/governments to meet the need.

Threat: Funding for a limited time only.

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II. Negative Economic Impacts

Assistance to households such as: food assistance, rent/mortgage/utility assistance, counseling & legal aid to prevent eviction & homelessness, cash assistance, emergency assistance for burials (COVID related death), home repairs, weatherization or other needs, internet access, digital literacy assistance, job training to address negative economic & public health impacts experienced due to a worker's occupation or level of training.

Presumption that a household experienced unemployment, food/housing insecurity, or low to moderate income experienced a negative impact resulting from the pandemic.

1. Provide assistance to households by disseminating ARPA funding to local social service agencies, such as PADS, YWCA, United Way, Food Pantry, Churches, etc.

Strength: Meets clear intent of ARPA by targeting low income individuals; utilizes social service infrastructure already in place in Lee County; minimizes administrative burden to Lee County Staff for receiving, reviewing, denying, or awarding requests.

Weakness:

Opportunity: Collaborate and build relationships with social service agencies in the community. Target community members hardest hit by COVID and in need of assistance.

Threat: Administration – relying on outside agency to ensure the funds are used within the guidelines and reported to Lee County in a timely manner.

2. Assistance to small businesses, tourism, travel & hospitality in the form of grants to Cities/Villages for distribution to small businesses, tourism, travel, hospitality in their community. (Example: Next Picture Show HVAC modification request.)

Strength: Positive economic impact in the community; supports local businesses; utilize the knowledge/experience of City/Village leaders to disseminate funds to deserving business; minimal administration required by Lee County.

Weakness: Potential for duplication for Cities/Villages that have their funding to do this.

Opportunity: Collaboration with Cities/Villages, small businesses & tourism to promote economic growth

Threat: Administration – relying on outside agency to ensure the funds are used within the guidelines and reported to Lee County in a timely manner.

3. Working with local colleges, BEST and other agencies to provide job training programs, covering the expenses for those programs. Allowing “scholarships” of sort to specific training areas needed within our community manufacturing & businesses.

Strength: Offer opportunities to the community to learn new skills, gain skills to accelerate the rehiring of workers. Potential for colleges, BEST, Inc. and other agencies to provide administration, minimizing the need for administration by Lee County.

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Weakness: Providing job training for workers, then having them leave the area/state to use those skills outside the County/State.

Opportunities: Collaboration with community programs, increase skilled workers needed for local businesses within our community

Threat: Administration – relying on outside agency to ensure the funds are used within the guidelines and reported to Lee County in a timely manner.

4. Collaborate with local park districts on needs, allocate a certain amount to be used in this area, local park districts can apply.

Strength: Repairs/Improvements to local parks & outdoor spaces.

Weakness:

Opportunity: Collaboration with local park districts to improve parks; attract visitors from out of the area/county.

Threat:

5. Allocate funding towards COVID related backlog of court cases. Allows hiring above pre-pandemic levels to address backlog

Strengths: Provide additional staff to handle backlog of cases; allowing more staff to review and prepare cases for trials, hearings or pleas; payroll costs allocated to ARPA, not County funds.

Weakness: Need to quantify the backlog associated with COVID; identify an effective way of decreasing backlog without placing undue stress on limited Judges available.

Opportunity: Address backlog of cases relieving future burden on court system and minimize length of time court cases pending-especially for victims, witnesses & County staff involved in the case.

Threat: Temporary funding source;

6. Rehire county staff up to levels as of January 27, 2020 when the pandemic was declared. Coverage for wages, benefits, training, etc. through 12/30/2026, as long as funding obligated by 12/30/2024.

Strength: Offset payroll/benefit expenses and bring staff up to pre-pandemic levels.

Weakness: Limited, if any, situations exist within the County that will apply to this category.

Opportunity:

Threat: Temporary funding source; County funds will be expended after 12/30/2026.

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III. Revenue Loss

As of 12/31/2020 calculation, Lee County has not experienced a Revenue Loss. In future years should we incur a revenue loss funds can be used to fund “government services”, building infrastructure, current infrastructure or many other uses.

IV. Premium Pay for Essential Workers

Those in critical infrastructure who regularly performed in-person work, working with others, working with the public, physically handle items handled by others. Healthcare, education, childcare, transportation, sanitation, grocery & food production, public health & safety, government employees. Retroactive to January 27, 2020, Can be provided as grants to third-party employers of essential workers; consider those that have not received additional compensation for their service during the pandemic. Prioritize low to moderate income workers.

1. Premium pay for all County employees for 1 year at a rate of \$2/hr for one year totaling \$525,000-575,000.
2. Request from Maintenance for \$25k (max amount per employee) for 4 Maintenance employees totaling \$100,000

Strengths: Offering premium pay for those employees who worked through the pandemic with person to person contact and did not receive premium pay to date. Category addresses prioritizing low to moderate income workers which is a large amount of County employees. Offering to those employees in other businesses in the community whose companies have not provided premium pay to their employees.

Weakness: Unable to provide to ALL businesses in the county that are eligible for premium pay.

Opportunity: Funds provided to County & community employees may be reinvested in our community through purchases at local businesses, tourism, etc.

Threat:

V. Investments in Water, Sewer and Broadband

1. Partnering with communities for water/sewer expansion for housing or industrial development

Strength: Attracting new businesses and housing developments to the area. Long range benefit-creates future jobs and spurring economic development.

Weakness: Development projects are expensive; funding allocation would need to be matched with other funding sources to fully complete a project; collaboration and project development could require a significant investment of time by County leaders/staff.

Opportunity: Collaboration with local cities to expand industries & housing. More employment and housing opportunities for residents.

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Threat: Longer project development time needed when partnering with other agencies.

2. Broadband. Assessing our current connections and upgrading the areas that fall below minimum standards

Strength: Potential for collaboration with neighboring counties on broadband project. Offering faster broadband can attract businesses to relocate to our area. Allowing residents the ability to work from home, remote school from home with minimal issues. Potentially attracting families who are remote workers, to relocate to our area.

Weakness: Collaboration and project development could require a significant investment of time by County leaders/staff.

Opportunity: Long range benefit which could spur economic growth in areas that do not currently have reliable high speed internet availability.

Threat: Longer project development time needed when partnering with other agencies.

Sara solicited the attendees for any additional potential projects. Being none, the Board members were then asked to select their top five priority projects. The results of the straw poll were then compiled with the following top 5 priorities identified:

- 1) Assistance to small businesses, tourism, travel/hospitality.
- 2) Assistance to households using local service agencies (PADS, Food Pantry, etc.)
- 3) Job Training programs, working with BEST, SVCC, etc.
- 4) Technology improvements to county Board meeting rooms
- 5) Improvements to Broadband infrastructure

It was noted the projects that did not make the top 5 priority list are not eliminated from consideration, but rather the ARPA Committee will focus on these priorities first. ARPA staff will work on developing administrative processes for the priorities, and bring recommendations to the ARPA Committee at next month's meeting. Sara recommended the Committee consider revisiting the priorities periodically over the next few years, noting that conditions and priorities may change over time.

Motion to adjourn by Chris Norberg:

Second by Rick Humphrey:

Meeting was adjourned at 12:39 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by,

Wendy Ryerson – Lee County Administrator

The next American Rescue Plan Act Committee Meeting is tentatively scheduled for 9:00 a.m., Thursday, November 4, 2021.