

**Porter County American Rescue Plan  
Sub Committee Non Profits & Employers  
Monday, April 25, 2022, 5 p.m.  
Commissioners' Meeting Room Chambers  
Porter County Administration Center 155 Indiana Ave., Valparaiso IN 46383**

**Members Present:**

Mike Brickner  
Erik Wagner  
Ruth Vance  
Rebecca Tomerlin

Jim Biggs - Absent

Mike Brickner opened the meeting and advised tonight the committee will hear four applications.

**Motion:** Erik Wagner moved to approve the minutes from the March 4 and March 11 meetings. Seconded by Ruth Vance and so approved with a 4-0 vote.

Vicki Urbanik addressed the Committee. She has handed out the scoring rubric and a sheet showing the requirements the Committee has. They are dealing with the assistance to small businesses and assistance to non-profits. The applicants must demonstrate economic harm caused or exasperated by covid and there must be an evaluation of how the money is going to be used. Is it related to that harm and is it reasonably proportional? These are not a guideline but are a requirement. All approvals have to be reported to the US Treasury.

**Presentations:**

Each organization has 15 minutes for their presentation. There will be 15 minutes for Q & A after the presentation.

**Coffee Creek Watershed Conservancy (Boardwalk)**

Jenny Osborn – member of the Coffee Creek Watershed Conservancy Board presented. Their request is for a boardwalk at the preserve. This is a 170 acre preserve with five miles of trails, bridges, boardwalks, plaza, restroom facilities, parking and amphitheater. They are a non-for profit. It is open to the public at no charge. Their request is to install 550 linear feet of new boardwalk at Symphony Hill. The amount is \$130,000 for materials and labor. During covid visiting parks has been a big part of mental health and physical wellbeing. They saw an increase in use during covid. It was during this time the Board decided to look at the trails and boardwalks. It was decided to replace the main boardwalk because it was deteriorating due to the increase in use. They figured they could then tackle the Symphony Hill boardwalk. They used their own funds to fix that main boardwalk. They can stay on time and within budget.

They will use local labor to install the boardwalk. This boardwalk will continue provide a connection in the trail network that would not be impeded by fluctuations in storm water. This type of boardwalk is being installed in the Indiana Dunes State Park and the National Park. As a non-profit they are unable to access State and Federal Funds for improvements. If granted, 100% of the funds would be spent on this project.

Q – Is this the granite finds?

A – Yes and it is currently down to just mud.

Q – Has the excess use caused some of the drainage issues?

A – Yes. Now people are making their own paths.

Q – You mentioned using some of your own funds.

A – That was in answer to have we received any other covid money. We got funding for covid sick leave. We have not received any other.

Q – They have put forth money for a boardwalk repair. Is that project completed?

A – The materials have been purchased. Work will begin this spring.

Q – Were you already planning on doing Symphony Hill before you applied for the ARPA Funds?

A – It is something that was moved up on the priority list due to the impact they saw.

Q – So the harm came from the increased use caused by covid?

A – Yes

Q – Did weather have anything to do with it?

A – Weather always has impact on a park. People expect to be able to access the trail network.

Q – If you do not get a grant from the County to do this, will the project still get done?

A – They have no other place to get funding. They will have to accumulate the funds over the years within their own budget.

Q – Do you fundraise?

A – For programs, not for infrastructure projects.

Q – How did you get the money for the project they are doing.

A – We were able to be fiscally conservative and set aside funding until they can afford a big-ticket item.

Q – Do you rely mostly on donations?

A – They are a unique non-profit that is funded through funds received from a home owners association. On an annual basis they collect from the homeowners and businesses in the conservancy area.

Q – What is your annual budget?

A - About \$270,000. \$100,000 of that is set aside for capital improvements.

Q – The annual budget was not harmed by covid but the increased use is what caused the harm?

A – Yes.

Q – Do you have any role in setting the home owner association fees and the portion that would go to help maintain?

A – The covenants restrict them to only seek an increase that is comparable to the CPI of this area.

Q – Can you explain how your response is proportional and related to the harm experienced by covid?

A – Providing public open space is hard to quantify. They do not take numbers to know how many people they have come through in a day. They feel they had harm because this is where people came to be in open space. This is a resource that will be in place from here on out. The public expected to access every part of the system. This area needs improvement.

Q – Do you have an estimate on this project.

A – Yes. We used the same figures as the project we are starting this spring.

Q – Will you use the same company.

A – Yes. They will have to be mindful of any bidding requirements for receiving the funds.

Q – Has work in the past been done by volunteers?

A – We have a strong volunteer organization. It is difficult to get volunteers for this type of work.

Q – Would you be willing to accept a lesser amount if offered?

A – Yes.

Q – Can you go forward with the project if you get a lesser amount?

A – As long as the deadline for expending the funds is 2026. They will have to wait to bank their own funds.

Q – You have to be able to obligate the funds by mid-2024. Will you be able to do that?

A – Yes.

Q – Even if you don't get the full amount from us.

A – Yes

### **Coffee Creek Watershed Conservancy (Revenue loss)**

Jenny Osborn – member of the Coffee Creek Watershed Conservancy Board presented. This is in response to one year of loss. They rent the pavilion for special events and have an amphitheater. They raise about \$8-\$10,000 annually. In 2020 they had to return all of their rentals. This is just refunds for events that were cancelled in 2020.

Q – Do you have any revenue loss in 2021.

A – A slight dip. Nothing significant.

Q – Did you receive any Federal aid.

A – Again, just the sick leave for covid employees.

C – Due to CDC guidelines all the events had to be cancelled.

### **Liberty Township Volunteer Fire Department**

Michael Wineland and Aaron Steinhilber presented. They cover Liberty Township and Jackson Township. Due to covid they had a large increase in call volume which added wear and tear to the equipment. They had to cancel fund raising events. Many of the area residents and businesses were unable to donate due to hardship of lost income. He went through the various trucks and repairs that need to be done. Most of them have repairs that are more than the value of the truck. Many members of the department got covid. It was difficult to keep up maintenance on the equipment. The medical squad was used for so many calls the maintenance was deferred. The cost of repairs to this truck is \$250,000. A new truck has been ordered. With the increase in house fires their tanker has had more work than usual. 95% of

their territory does not have hydrants. Their truck is the biggest in Porter County and therefore gets called by other Townships frequently. Maintenance also on this truck has been deferred due to covid hardship. A crack in the tank went unnoticed. The cost to repair the tank is more than the worth of the truck. Replacing this truck will cost \$453,000.

Covid has changed the department. They have gone from approximately 700 calls per year to 900 in 2020 and over 1,000 in 2021. They are a 100% volunteer department. The original fire house was constructed in 1955. The building has had several additions and retrofits. It has code compliancy issues that cannot be resolved without shutting down all operations and emptying out the building. Because of limited space, trucks are blocking other trucks which increases the time it takes them to get out the door. The building is flooding with a moderate to heavy rain. There is minimal storage space. There is less than 1" of overhead clearance for trucks. There is no separation of public and private areas. The kitchen is inadequate for hosting events. There is no dedicated decontamination area. They need the \$6 Million for a new station to prepare for the future of the fire department. They have already completed some engineering and architectural studies. The station design is set. Several properties have been considered and are available for purchase if needed. A construction contract could be signed by the end of 2023. Last spring there was a severe storm. Citizens came to the station to shelter during the storm. They had to be turned away because the building is not safe.

Q - Is it safe to say that the increase cost due to the increase of calls and the lack of fundraising is the negative impact directly due to covid.

A - Yes. They can show several million dollars' worth of negative impact.

Q - With inflation is that included in the \$6 Million.

A - Yes. That pricing is what was provided by the engineer.

Q - And you can meet the 2024 and 2026 deadlines?

A - Yes.

Q - Do you have any other sources of funding.

A - We do door to door fund raising. We have seen a huge decrease due to people being out of work. They cannot host anything at the station anymore. It is an unsafe building and the kitchen is not adequate. Liberty and Jackson Township both provide funding each year. Total is about \$350,000.

Q - You can sustain operations?

A - Yes. They have a plan in place for part time staffing.

Q - The building plans were put on hold due to covid.

A - Yes.

Q - Is any of the original funding left.

A - Most of that has had to go to repairs.

Q - Do you have a rough idea of how much is left or if Liberty and/or Jackson Township will be giving you money over the next few years.

A - The funding from Liberty and Jackson is yearly.

Q - Sunset Hill is adding events every year. There is no safe haven for citizens in the area. The new station is designed to be a safe haven for Liberty and Jackson Township. They get 911 calls from the hospital or the medical building in front to the Emergency Room.

Q – Before Covid 16% funding from donations 9% from grants and \$350,000 from Jackson and Liberty Township.

A – The \$350,000 is from Liberty Township and Jackson Township. Other donations are on top of that. They have been turned down by FEMA four times for the air packs.

Q – Did RQAW do the study?

A – Yes. The design was DLZ. DLZ gave the \$6 Million Quote. RQAW did a feasibility study.

Q – Are you moving to a new site or building it where the current building is?

A – They have looked at four other sites. It will depend on what is best.

Q – Does the \$6 Million include land?

A – If they have to go to another location, they will downsize the station to compensate for the purchase of land.

Q – Will you accept less if offered?

A – Yes, the only issue is that without that amount they probably will not be able to build a concrete station to be a severe weather center.

Q – Are you saying you would be able to build something?

A - We could build something. It would not be what they have designed now or a safe haven building.

Q – How many volunteer fire departments are there in Porter County?

A – There are 15. They are sustaining because they are smaller and the square area they cover gets a lot less calls. They are looking at 300-500 calls per year. This year Liberty has received 300 calls already.

Q – The current fire station is owned by Liberty Township as a government. Is that correct.

A – As of right now the Township owns our building. As a non-profit the Department would own the new building.

Q – Can you meet the timeline?

A – Yes.

### **VNA Hospice of Northwest Indiana**

Bob Franko, President and CEO presented. The request is \$350,000 to expand the Meals on Wheels program. They would like to buy a building in south county to be more efficient. \$150,000 would be used to increase their bandwidth. They provide home hospice care. An in-house hospice care center. A fully accredited palliative care program. They are the Meals on Wheels provider. They have medical guardian program – Call when you fall. They also have the Phoenix Center which is bereavement for kids. One program makes money. The others are a needed service so they will continue to offer them.

They now have 70 hospice patients in private homes and 30 in centers. Their numbers have been dropping and they do not see it increasing. The labor costs way exceeds the revenue. A few years ago, the cost per encounter was \$85. It is now \$115. Meals on Wheels demand has exploded. They have 250-300 clients. He showed a graph that shows costs exceed the number of people served. They lose about \$150,000 on the meals on wheels program.

They started a strategic plan that included engaging with the community and seeing where they can fill gaps. 71% identified senior day care centers and other day care needs. Also, affordable home health care and senior overnight care. They run very thin administratively. They need bandwidth to go out and see what the needs are and develop a business program.

Q – If given the request, will it be sustainable.

A – They want to buy a facility. They are working on another fund raiser to purchase a vehicle to get the meals to the south county.

Q – Do you have a location picked out?

A – No. We have realtors looking for us.

Q – Are you looking at a glorified garage?

A – What we think we would like is a store front or house.

Q – Are there any funds already.

A – We do have some matching funds. We recently received a donation from an estate.

Q – Have you received any covid funds?

A – Yes. We tried to take advantage of what was being offered. In 2020 they received almost \$1.3 Million dollars in funds and grants. This was used to keep staff employed. They did not lay one person off during the pandemic.

Q – Would you accept less?

A – Yes, it would just take them longer.

Q – Can you meet the timeline deadlines.

A – Yes.

Q – Is the director listed at \$150,000 a long-term position?

A – Yes. It would pay for itself.

### **Public Comment**

Robyn Lane –Meals on Wheels has many people relying on it for their sole source of food. Liberty Township is servicing the hospital. This is serving the entire community since this is the only hospital in the County.

There being no one else wishing to address the Committee, Mike Brickner declared the Public Comment section closed.

The meeting adjourned.