



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

SUMMARY

August 29, 2022
5:00 P.M.
Hybrid Meeting

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

D. Reed, C. Daubert, C. Miller, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, J. Cepeda-Freytiz, (in person)

OTHERS PRESENT:

L. Kelleher, J. Stoudt, E. Moran, B. Heim, M. Gombar, F. Freytiz; J. Abodalo, (in person), S. Smith, F. Lachat, J. Kelly, WFMZ, M. Lynch, BCTV (virtually)

The meeting was called to order at 5:06 pm by Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz.

I. ARPA Applications Submitted but Not Considered

Mr. Kelly stated that the total amount currently allocated to non-profit organizations is \$5,334,883.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if those who will not be receiving allocations have been informed. Mr. Kelly stated that all organizations will be contacted after Council determines the allocations.

- Z. Ordinance – Opportunity House - \$200,000 ARPA Grant Funding Allocation

Mr. Daubert expressed the belief that this is a reasonable request and stated that he supports this allocation.

Ms. Reed and Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz also noted their support of this allocation.

- AA. Ordinance – RIZE - \$100,000 ARPA Grant Funding Allocation

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted her concern with RIZE's capacity to spend the funding in the one year timeline. She also noted her concern that this funding would be used toward salaries.

Mr. Daubert stated that other organizations that are not located within Reading have been eliminated. He questioned how RIZE is different as it is also located outside the City. He noted the need for consistency.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that Schuylkill River Greenway does not have a City address.

Ms. Reed stated that Schuylkill River Greenway is based in Pottstown but does extensive work on the Schuylkill River Trail, including the areas of the trail that are in Reading.

Mr. Daubert stated that having a physical address in Reading is a distinction.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that Schuylkill River Greenway was never located in Reading. She stated that it was very difficult for her to disqualify Schuylkill River Greenway because they do extensive work in Reading and are very committed to the City.

Ms. Ventura questioned the location of RIZE. Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that their office is in the Goggleworks. She stated that the RIZE director does not live in Reading.

Ms. Reed stated that the confusion may be because the same person applied for funds as Berks for Peace with a Wyomissing address.

Mr. Gombar opined that since the applicant signed the perjury clause on the application that Council must consider the application based on the information it contains. He reminded all that during the completion of the grant agreement it may be discovered that the organization is located outside Reading and the funds would not be awarded because the organization is not eligible.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz reminded all that organizations will need to submit an operational budget and have fiscal management. She noted the need for accountability to ensure the organizations use the funding for its intended purpose.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted her concern that all components of the program be recognized by the applicant. She stated that this is the same for all grant awards. She noted the need for the organizations to not use the grant funds to supplant (replace) current funding. She questioned how this would be ensured.

Mr. Gombar suggested that this language be included in the grant agreement and stated that no additional ordinance is necessary.

Mr. Kelly stated that he will include this language in the grant agreement.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for the organizations to submit their grant use plan and the number of people that they have assisted using the funding as part of their reporting requirements.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz agreed and noted that there needs to be a high level of impact and success.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested also including an equity statement in the grant agreement to insure that all in need receive the benefits of the grant funding.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that the Opportunity House and RIZE allocations will be introduced at the September 12 Council meeting and are eligible for enactment at the September 26 meeting.

II. ARPA Allocations Deferred at the August 24 ARPA Meeting

- Q. Ordinance – Reading FilmFEST - \$200,000 ARPA Grant Funding Allocation

Mr. Kelly stated that the 501 C 3 is registered to Reading Film.

- S. Ordinance – Reading Science Center - \$20,000 ARPA Grant Funding Allocation

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that the original amount requested was \$23,488 but that a higher amount was requested during their Council presentation.

Mr. Daubert stated that the most recent submission is for approximately \$86,000. He stated that the use to subsidize the entrance fee for Reading students is a very clear use of the funding. He stated that the grant would subsidize \$6 of the \$8 entrance fee for approximately 14,000 students. He expressed the belief that this is a reasonable amount and noted the need for the funding to be used to subsidize all Reading students, not only those attending Reading School District buildings.

Ms. Ventura stated that increasing the funding level to \$86,000 for the Reading Science Center would keep the total allocation under the \$5.5 million maximum amount. She noted her support for the increased amount.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed the belief that the exhibits at the Science Center are geared toward middle and high school aged students. She stated that during the presentation, Ms. Unruh admitted that she misunderstood the application and only included the amount of lost revenue.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned if the Administration would like to comment.

Mr. Moran stated that the original submission was for approximately \$23,000. He stated that he based his recommendation on the information he had during his review. He stated that he was not present when the increased amount was requested.

Mr. Miller stated that this is a great example of how some organizations did not have a good understanding of the program and application process. He stated that Ms. Unruh stated that she thought only lost revenue could be requested and stated that she would appreciate the increased funding amount but that she would also appreciate any funding. He stated that the Science Center is located downtown and that it focuses on STEM education.

Mr. Daubert stated that he will only support the increased funding if the funds will be used to subsidize Reading student entrance fees. He noted the need to have this proposal in writing.

Ms. Reed questioned if the subsidy would be for Reading students only or any student within the County. Mr. Gombar stated that Council has the discretion to set the parameters for the use of the funds.

Ms. Reed noted the need for the City to be clear about the intent of the use of the increased funding.

Mr. Daubert suggested that this be included in the grant agreement for the Science Center. He suggested that the funding be up to \$80,000 and expressed the belief that not all of the funding will be spent for entrance fees.

Mr. Kelly stated that he will add this stipulation to their grant agreement.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the Science Center has been open more frequently and more students are attending. She stated that the Science Center submits appropriate information for their COCA grant.

Using the chat feature, Ms. Smith noted the need for Councilors to abide by the abstentions for the organizations with which they have conflicts of interest by recusing themselves from commenting.

Mr. Kelly questioned if parochial school students and those who are home schooled should be included. Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that they should be included.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz noted the need to increase the funding amount and to re-introduce this ordinance at the September 12 meeting.

Mr. Kelly questioned if the allocation would be for \$86,000. Council agreed with this amount.

III. Flag Policy

Mr. Moran stated that he has reviewed the draft resolution and legal research has been done. He requested that this discussion be postponed. He stated that the Supreme Court has issued a ruling on the Boston Flag Policy and noted the need for legal review of this decision. He stated that the Administration will then present its recommendations.

Mr. Gombar agreed with the recommendation to delay discussion. He stated that this resolution was drafted prior to the Supreme Court's decision. He stated that Boston has amended its policy accordingly and he would also like to review their updated policy.

Ms. Reed requested that Mr. Gombar participate in the review process.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she forwarded an article from the Boston Sun to Mr. Gombar. She noted the need to be mindful about how decisions are made to fly specific flags. She expressed the belief that many groups are disrespectful of core values and their flags should not be approved.

Ms. Ventura questioned if this is a new policy. Mr. Gombar stated that it is.

Ms. Reed suggested that there be a legal review of each group's request and that the approval to fly the flag be approved by Council resolution. Mr. Gombar agreed with this approach.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz stated that she also reviewed the draft policy and has many notes and corrections.

Mr. Moran noted the need for the City to pay attention to what commemorative flags represent.

IV. Other

- ARPA Allocations for colleges, universities and small businesses

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz noted the need for Council to schedule time to review the allocations for the City's colleges, universities and small businesses.

Ms. Reed expressed the belief that it is critical that the proper process is followed. She suggested that the consultant make the recommendations to City Council as they are a neutral 3rd party with no relationships to these organizations.

Mr. Kelly suggested that Council choose the total allocation amount and have Community First Fund administer the program. Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz agreed with this approach.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for Council to understand the full amount of ARPA funds and to ensure that sufficient funds are allocated for City projects and needs. She suggested that this be approached similarly to the annual budget process.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz agreed with Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz and noted her hope that Reading would stay out of Act 47. She noted the need to address City properties that could generate revenue such as the Pagoda, Fire Tower, and the riverfront. She noted her hope for an ice skating rink in City Park and ways to increase the activities and events at City facilities.

Mr. Kelly stated that the first Capital Budget meeting is being held on September 7 at noon. He encouraged Council members to attend. He stated that there will be a presentation on current projects and future needs. He stated that the Capital Budget will plan for 2023 and beyond.

Ms. Cepeda-Freytiz questioned what is being done to implement the recommendations in the Downtown Plus Plan. Mr. Kelly stated that he hopes to hold a joint planning session between the Administration and Council. He stated that the City is currently working on the Active Transportation Plan. *(Note: The Downtown Plus Plan has not yet been approved by City Council.)*

Ms. Kelleher questioned when planning would begin for the City's ARPA allocation that is not lost revenue. Mr. Kelly stated that this amount would need to be calculated after the external audit process is complete.

Mr. Moran requested that the lost revenue be allocated before moving to the next phase.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this issue was discussed at the last Audit Committee meeting. She stated that there will be a better understanding of the amount when the audit is completed.

- 6th & Penn Courtyard

Mr. Moran invited Council to attend the ribbon cutting and "Taste of Reading" at the courtyard on September 2 at 11 am. He stated that there will also be entertainment. He noted his hope that there will be increased use of this courtyard.

The meeting adjourned at 5:51 pm.

*Respectfully Submitted by
Linda A. Kelleher, CMC, City Clerk*