

From: Beth Linnea Verhey <bethlverhey@gmail.com>
Date: May 23, 2021 at 7:32:41 PM EDT
To: Chet Janik <cjanik@leelanau.gov>, Michelle Crocker <mcrocker@leelanau.gov>
Cc: Laurel Evans <levans@leelanau.gov>, Ty Wessell <ty.wessell@gmail.com>
Subject: Fwd: Please consult local stakeholders and newly released poverty reports to plan implementation of American Rescue Plan County \$4.2 million

Dear Administrator Janik,

In following up with a friend in Glen Arbor who is in touch with Commissioner Allgaier, she suggested I re-send to you my message and suggestions regarding priorities for the American Rescue Plan funds.

I would also like to refresh my request that my letter be included in the public comments/handouts. I've reviewed such from the May meetings and believe this was missed.

In addition to the ALICE Leelanau profile I attached, and to my letter, I understand Ty has shared with you and the Commissioners an Essay Collection, which includes an essay I co-authored with Ty focusing on poverty and the insights of the United Way ALICE metrics.

Focusing on considerations and preparations for the American Rescue Plan funds, I recently noted a Bridge article that the official US Treasury guidance is now out; there is a link in this article to the 151 page document.

<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-government/fun-michigan-governments-how-spend-11-billion-federal-stimulus>

Importantly, the funds can be allocated to local non-profits, so I wonder if outreach/discussions/preparations to receive funds could start with some of the 'front-line' experienced organizations, such as Leelanau Christian Neighbors and the Leelanau Township Community Foundation. In initial review myself, I'm glad to see water and sewer needs prioritized in a similar way to broadband, and references in both the health and economic categories to invest in our county's most in-need families, including housing assistance and child care needs. A category that may be overlooked is "equity focused services" which includes support to especially affected households and actions that support a "healthy childhood environment".

Thank you, I hope this is useful,
Best regards,
Beth Verhey

Begin forwarded message:

From: Beth Verhey <bethlverhey@gmail.com>
Date: April 26, 2021 at 18:01:01 EDT
To: rrobins@leelanau.gov, drushton@leelanau.gov, wbunek@leelanau.gov, twessell@leelanau.gov,
aier@leelanau.gov, mlautner@leelanau.gov, Chet Janik
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Subject: Please consult local stakeholders and newly released poverty reports to plan implementation of American Rescue Plan County \$4.2 million

Dear Commissioners, Administrator, neighbors,

I have been following your discussions regarding the \$4.2 million American Rescue Plan funds forthcoming to the County. While I understand you are waiting for further guidance, I am writing now to

suggest the Board, and other local leaders, have an urgent opportunity to pro-actively seek recommendations from frontline organizations to ensure the funds prioritize your residents most in need.

I am writing directly as I hope you will reach out for such recommendations ahead of your May meetings; and also respectfully request this email be shared for public comment linked to your May meetings.

While I appreciate Administrator Janik's updates in your April 13 meeting, including that the County is not yet receiving proposals, now is the time to seek stakeholder input to establish the priorities and mechanisms that will best reach households most affected by the pandemic, including economically.

National policy analysts and researchers are also pointing to the urgency and need to engage local, affected stakeholders. For example, an article entitled "**How should local leaders use their American Rescue Plan funding?**" from The Brookings Institution: *"The money needs to move fast and be deployed smartly and equitably. In 10 years, we may look back at this time and ask: Which places merely spent their money, and which places invested it?"*

Another article, "**The American Rescue Plan clears a path to recovery for state and local governments and the communities they serve**", by the Economic Policy Institute emphasizes that: *"Policymakers should talk to the people in the communities that have suffered the most; talk to the workers and families who have struggled to access public supports; talk to the parents who have had to juggle caring for and educating children while trying to work....."* and the need to attend to the disadvantaged communities shown to have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and growing income disparities, ^[i]*State and local tax policy and public investment decisions can and must be used to build more equitable and anti-racist communities.*"

In the last month, I have been struck by the irony of newly released reports on poverty in our County on the one hand, and waiting for external guidance to plan for the \$4.2 million "windfall" the County will receive as part of the American Rescue Plan. In Leelanau County **37% of households (3,348) are ALICE**, compared to 25% overall for Michigan. I attach the ALICE Leelanau County Profile for ease of reference.

The March 2021 ALICE Report highlights the 'impossibility' of 'middle class'. ALICE households are **Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed**; they earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but less than the established basic cost of living. Two further details are important to bear in mind: 1) the data available to produce the 2021 ALICE report is mostly from 2019, thus pre-dates the impacts of the COVID pandemic, and 2) an additional 6% (535) of Leelanau County households are below the Federal Poverty Level, and thus struggling even more than ALICE households to make ends meet.

A new report by the collaborative Michigan Poverty Task Force presented 35 solutions, pointed out the "plague of structural" factors hindering poverty solutions, and highlighted the urgency of addressing child poverty.

The Poverty Task Force recommendations add to many other solid research reports and recommendations. The 2016 National Council of Counties' White House Council Poverty Summit, reported that the keys for rural counties' success are early childhood programming, strong schools, broadband access and an economic development plan. Thus, in addition to the priority you are already giving to broadband, thank you, early childhood programming is another key area to invest such funds. The earlier mentioned EPI article also highlighted that *"Providing safe, enriching, and accessible schools and other child care centers is critical for working parents, too. Child care and other learning centers account for a little less than 1% of state and local employment, but the importance of this workforce was made abundantly clear in the pandemic. State and local governments need to consider whether past resources provided for early child care education are really meeting the needs of working families in their communities."*

I listened to your discussion of the mapping survey to prepare for the broadband service improvements our County needs. Just as your discussions flagged the mapping survey as an important step "to get

ahead” and ready for other ARP fund plans, reviewing recent poverty reports and gathering stakeholder priorities will expedite your ARP fund decisions, and eventual reach of such funds to households and businesses in need.

The Brookings Institution article noted that “*ARP provides funding for “Community Navigators” to ensure equitable access to capital and technical assistance. This requires organizational coalitions that have legitimacy and reach in a diverse range of communities.*”

While citizens can write-in, call-in to your meetings, such is insufficient to ‘invite in’ the practical experience of those most affected by the pandemic. An expedient approach in the current context would be to request input from, and base fund allocation decisions on the recommendations of, representative organizations, such as:

- Leelanau Christian Neighbors and other frontline food and social services organizations,
- Consult young people, for example through the LIFT Teen Center,
- Housing North, and others working on critically needed affordable housing,
- Grand Traverse Band, Northwest Michigan Migrant Resource Council and others focused on communities prevalent in poverty disparities, and,
- Networks Northwest, United Way’s 211 and other groups with knowledge of the types of assistance most needed.

Please ensure the population groups and recommendations of these reports are prioritized for your decisions in allocating the County’s \$4.2 million American Rescue funds.

Thank you,
Beth Verhey, Northport

References and links mentioned:

2021 Michigan Poverty Task Force Report, - https://www.michigan.gov/documents/leo/LEO-Poverty_Task_Force_Report_716585_7.pdf - Released February 17, 2021; And Article in Record Eagle, March 14, 2021 - https://www.record-eagle.com/news/local_news/report-michigan-poverty-plagued-by-structural-mechanism/article_d3b2df06-7e3c-11eb-905c-6313f384ad88.html

United Way Alice Report 2021 - <https://www.unitedforalice.org/export-pdf> and <https://www.unitedforalice.org/county-profiles/michigan>

Brookings Institution article, “**How should local leaders use their American Rescue Plan funding?**”, by Brad Whitehead and Joseph Parilla, March 23, 2021- <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2021/03/23/how-should-local-leaders-use-their-american-rescue-plan-funding/>

Economic Policy Institute article, “**The American Rescue Plan clears a path to recovery for state and local governments and the communities they serve**”, March 15, 2021, by David Cooper, Julia Wolfe, and Sebastian Martinez Hickey - <https://www.epi.org/blog/the-american-rescue-plan-clears-a-path-to-recovery-for-state-and-local-governments-and-the-communities-they-serve/>

Leelanau Early Childhood Committee Report, August 2019 - <https://www.leelanau.gov/lceccc.asp>