

New Bedford's Mayor Mitchell outlines investment priorities for City's federal ARPA funds

Elise Rapoza of UMD's Public Policy Center Named ARPA Director.

Mayor Jon Mitchell has outlined investment priorities for more than \$80 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, focusing on transformational projects and programs that will leverage additional sources of capital, maximize the funding's impacts and improve the lives of city residents for generations.

"The opportunities now before New Bedford are perhaps greater than at any point in the past century," he said. "These investments will be instrumental to launching the city out of the pandemic and promoting long-term growth that is sustainable and equitable."

The outline sets approximate allocations for the \$64.7 million that ARPA directly allocates to New Bedford, plus \$16.7 million the city will receive in ARPA funds through Bristol County. The outline does not include the \$46.5 million received under a separate ARPA provision by the New Bedford School Department, which is finalizing plans for those funds.

Mayor Mitchell shared his outline with New Bedford City Council this week. He emphasized the criteria placed on ARPA spending by the federal Department of the Treasury, which does not allow for direct spending on road construction or the lowering of taxes, for example.

Extensive public input into investment priorities has included

hearings, surveys, stakeholder meetings, written submissions and media coverage. In his letter to City Councilors, Mayor Mitchell also emphasized the need to avoid spending the city's ARPA dollars on uses that could be funded from other sources, such as from the \$5.3 billion in ARPA dollars coming to the Commonwealth—which state officials have indicated could fund water and wastewater projects, port infrastructure and cultural facilities—or federal infrastructure spending recently signed into law by President Biden.

Bearing those principles in mind, Mayor Mitchell focused on seven key investment priorities:

- Health, safety and well-being – \$8 million
- Neighborhood stabilization and housing support – \$13 million
- Small business support – \$8 million
- Enhancements to open spaces in qualified census tracts – \$11 million
- Non-state share of water, wastewater and stormwater projects – \$6 million
- Arts, culture, hospitality and tourism – \$18 million
- Matching funds for strategic investments – \$14 million

At least \$1.2 million for revenue replacement – ARPA criteria allows for restoring operating funds lost due to COVID-19 – and \$1.5 million for administration round out the priorities.

Mayor Mitchell said that ultimately, prospective ARPA projects should be evaluated based on their potential return on investment.

“The more matching funding a project receives from private or public sources, the greater the return on the City's investment will be,” he said. “The most favored projects would be those that confer new benefits to the City; that is, those that grow the pie, as opposed to those that entail the replacement of an existing asset.”

To navigate ARPA criteria and regulations, collaborate with

potential funding recipients, track outcomes, document how spending meets ARPA goals, and more, the city has named Elise Rapoza its ARPA Director. Rapoza comes to the role from UMass-Dartmouth, where she spent four years as the senior research associate for the recently closed Public Policy Center and served as the university's first assistant director of corporate engagement. Both roles were deeply embedded in regional demographics, workforce needs, and opportunities such as maritime industries and offshore wind development.

"I'm very excited about collaborating with all the people in the community who I already know and love, and getting to meet the people who I don't already know," she said. "There's a lot of good things coming."

"Elise will bring to her new role a wealth of talent, economic development expertise, and knowledge of the City," Mayor Mitchell said. "She is the right person to activate this infusion of federal resources."