

Ad Hoc Committee to Recommend How Darien Will Spend \$6.4 Million in Federal COVID-19 Aid

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Darien, like other local governments around the country, is getting a sudden infusion of federal aid this year to make up for extra money spent on COVID-19.

Darien's slice of the \$130 billion pie amounts to \$6.4 million. An ad hoc committee has been appointed to suggest where the town should spend the money.

First Selectman Monica McNally mentioned the committee as part of her roundup of updates to the Board of Selectmen at its meeting Monday night.

What the town decides to spend the money on is restricted, but the federal government will allow the spending to go toward "public health expenditures, address the negative economic impacts caused by the public health emergency, replace lost public sector revenue, provide premium pay for essential workers, invest in water, sewer and broadband infrastructure," said Selectman Jon Zagrodzky, who's been appointed to head the panel.

"We can't use the funds to reduce taxes or to fund pensions," he said Monday night in a brief report to the Board of Selectmen.

The ARPA committee, named after the American Rescue Plan Act (signed into law last March) that allows the funding, held its first organizational meeting on Dec. 14. The committee's next meeting, to be held via Zoom.com, starts at 1 p.m., Tuesday.

Jon Zagrodzky is now our chairman of the committee, which is tasked with making recommendations to the board on how to allocate the \$6.4 million in funding that Darien will receive. That committee will meet tomorrow.

Darien has already received half the funds, and the second half is expected to be transferred to the town in June, Town Administrator Kathleen Buch said.

"We need to arrive at these [spending] recommendations in a way that the public views as thoughtful, transparent and fair," Zagrodzky said.

"I think we follow the general work plan as follows: Starting with idea generation, and then idea screening and prioritization, and then, finally, a recommendation development for this board."

Zagrodzky said he's not sure how long it will take, but hopes the committee will complete its work by April 1.

Sunday's COVID-19 Test Kit Distribution

McNally said the town government received 3,456 COVID-19 test kits to distribute. The kits were sent to the state by the federal Department of Homeland Security.

The distribution event went smoothly, she said. "I would like to thank my fellow selectmen very much for helping, also our town employees, and our terrific police force that kept traffic moving smoothly and the friends that volunteered."

McNally didn't say so, but Darienite.com has heard that not all of the test kits were distributed. Both Darien and Stamford officials separately said that they would send out a CodeRed alert if test kits ran out before the announced time for concluding the distribution events. That didn't happen in either community.

Test Kits Mean No Daily Testing Statistics

With more people testing themselves and their family members for COVID-19, it isn't possible for the state to keep track of the numbers, McNally said, so daily numbers will no longer be reported. "Weekly numbers will be provided on Tuesdays and will be posted on the town's website," she said.

Booster Clinics

The town's booster clinic for Tuesday is full, McNally said, "but there are spots available for the booster clinic on Saturday. This is a first for us to do a booster clinic on Saturday. We're trying to open it up to a wider audience, and appointments are available [on VAMS](#) right now." The Saturday clinic runs from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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The town could use more volunteers to help with the booster clinics, Selectman Michael Burke pointed out. McNally agreed, and said anyone who would step up to help the effort can contact her [mmcnally@darienct.gov or call (203) 656-7338], the first selectman's executive secretary, Linda O'Leary, [lOLEARY@darienct.gov or call (203) 656-7333] or the town Health Department [call 203-656-7320].

Regular booster clinics will continue on Tuesdays, but some other days and times are also expected for people who can't get to the daytime Tuesday clinics, McNally said.

Building Committee for School Projects

"A new building committee is being formed for the renovation projects at the three elementary schools — Hindley, Holmes and Royle — and if you have construction, architectural, financial or legal expertise we hope you will consider volunteering on this committee," McNally said. "Please reach out to the [First] Selectman's Office to let us know you're interested. We're forming that committee right now."