



Mayor David Goins Presents His American Rescue Plan Of Action For Alton

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ALTON - Emphasizing the analogy used by Comptroller Debbie Dunlap of emergency air masks dropping from the ceiling in an airplane, Alton Mayor David Goins said that Alton must take care of itself first, just like when these masks drop in an airplane.” Goins said, “Airline staff will tell you, that if these oxygen masks drop, take care of yourself first, then assist others”.



This analogy was used at the two public meetings held on November 14 at Alton's City Hall to reiterate the need for ARPA funds to assist the City's operational and financial needs. Goins said that the City must use these funds to continue improving "our financial and operational management positions and to recover the lost revenues to the City because of the pandemic."

The forums provided an opportunity for Mayor Goins and his administration to share the priority proposals for the use of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds provided to the City of Alton in federal legislation passed last year.

During these public meetings, Mayor Goins indicated to the assembled group “that early on he directed his City department heads to study the federal law and the guidelines to identify the long- term goals to achieve for the City utilizing ARPA funds”.

Goins instructed his administration and department head leaders to provide “only slam dunks” for the City’s ARPA goals. During the presentation it was made clear that the Mayor and his administration made conscious decisions to balance these goals against the City’s operational needs and to take action to stabilize the city’s budget, making critical investments in public health, safety, economic recovery, and equity.

During the forums, Alton City Comptroller Debbie Dunlap, informed the public of the goal to create a more resilient general fund and to take the steps necessary to capitalize on the one-time nature of the ARPA funding.

The comptroller explained this funding opportunity will allow Alton to address financial concerns that will free up future General Fund resources to support transformational investments for Alton’s future. The Comptroller reiterated that the City needs to take the position that we should utilize ARPA dollars to deliver long-term impacts without creating new fiscal burdens. ARPA guidance from the federal government in fact shows that these funds are not intended for new programs but to bolster existing services because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Comptroller informed the public “this is a one-time opportunity for the City to create sustainable cost-saving measures so the city can reinvest for long-term sustainability for years to come”. She presented short, mid, and long-term financial measures that the City is pursuing to fortify its financial position, particularly in the light of the lost revenues due to the pandemic. She explained the need to create solid foundations for equipment replacement so that these high-dollar expenses will not keep occurring. She also expressed the need for the City to create a fund to apply for grants and other funds to help offset impacts on the City’s bottom line.

The public forums also included a review of the process that the City of Alton’s department heads used for their project priority setting as directed by Mayor Goins. These projects were ranked and ordered in importance and need. Alton City Council members had also been briefed on these projects and were asked to suggest projects and to also review the priority needs of the staff and Mayor recommended projects.

In August, the Alton City Council approved the use of the standard allowance of \$10M for lost revenue from ARPA funds. This guidance, provided by the US Treasury, allows a unit of government to take a standard deduction within their ARPA allowance to be used for loss revenue recapture. In September, the Council approved several initial ARPA emergency project expenditures to address matters related to public health and

safety. These projects also had a long lead time with respect to supply, so timeliness was a need. Projects approved by the Council included a citywide HVAC update, the purchase of a new Fire Department aerial ladder truck and two new EMS-equipped ambulances. The Council also approved the purchase of new City IT servers and support for the Riverview Drive improvement project. All these projects fell within ARPA guidelines and requirements.

During the public forum presentation, the ARPA project priorities were presented and included the purchase of new public works equipment, like dump trucks, a new street sweeper, a paving machine, and other needs. Public Works Director Mike Parsons said that these purchases will “allow the City much more flexibility in approaching the City’s street improvement program.” He explained that with the present lack of equipment that is old and in need of constant repairs, much of the work to improve the City’s streets must be contracted out, these purchases will allow for the City to take a more direct role in developing the street improvement program.”

For the projects, Mayor Goins placed a priority on public work needs. In addition, he also placed a priority on the City’s parks and recreation program. The City’s parks system has experienced high usage during the pandemic and much of the park’s infrastructure has been neglected. ARPA funds will allow for the restoration of park pavilions, playgrounds, and other amenities across the City.

Additional projects he recommended included improvement to the City’s human capital, by completing a compensation study, training programs, and a new system to onboard and manage the City’s employees. Community projects were also recommended that included a utility assistance program, home repair service, and small business assistance. There were several projects presented that included marina improvements, a demolition program, homeless prevention, great streets, and riverfront development that could be prioritized as well.

At the conclusion of these forums, staff explained that all the Mayor’s administrative projects, totaling \$7,871,775 that are recommended fall well within the amount of ARPA funds that the City received which totaled \$21,639,201. During the emergency approval process in September, \$12,828,000 were approved for expenses designated as an emergency need by the Council. This leaves \$8,811,201 dollars available for other ARPA-designated uses. The Comptroller pointed out that even with the Mayor’s recommended projects, over \$900,000 in ARPA funds remain.

The Mayor concluded the meetings by indicating that these are his recommendations and his administration’s top priorities based upon his staff input across all city

departments. These projects will be brought before the City Council at a future meeting to further discuss and approve. It was also noted at the meeting that all ARPA funds must be obligated by the end of 2024 and expended by the end of 2026.

Copies of the presentation made at the forum, the department head worksheets and other information about ARPA is posted on the City's website at www.cityofaltonil.com.