

Letter To The Editor: Alton Needs To Contemplate Spending Of ARPA Funds Carefully

by Michael Drake

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ALTON - For those unaware of the American Rescue Plan of Action (ARPA) funds, Alton received over \$21MM in ARPA funds in 2022. The use of these funds is very restricted, misuse can result in stiff penalties, the least of which is Alton having to reimburse the misspent funds. Madison County also received ARPA funds and hired Ernst & Young, one of the Big Four accounting firms, to ensure that the guidelines were followed.



A couple of months ago, a public hearing was held at City Hall, to read the department head's wish list and to meet the federal requirements of a “public hearing.” There are some worthwhile expenditures cited, new HVAC systems for five city buildings, a ladder truck, two EMS ambulances, a street sweeper, paving equipment for our pothole-filled streets, servers for the city’s IT department, etc.

The above-mentioned equipment will cost well over \$12MM, leaving less than \$9MM for other projects. One proposed use is one of the wildest ideas and the biggest waste of money I’ve ever heard. Alton’s new comptroller, Debbie Dunlap has requested \$881,000 to erase 180+ day-old delinquent trash pickup bills.

Collection of this money is a function of her department, and if a collection letter doesn’t work, send another one, dig deep, find a good phone number, file a lien on the property. There are much worthier ways to spend this money, but to just be handed nearly a million dollars on behalf of people who refused to pay their bills is a slap in the face of every citizen in Alton. This is nothing but a money grab, and to even suggest this is shameful!

By the way, these ARPA funds don’t have to be designated until December 31, 2024. Slow down and come up with something that benefits Alton, not subsidize a delinquency that the comptroller’s department should never have allowed to get to this point!

If the city really wants to do something worthwhile with these funds, throw some at the Alton Boys and Girls Club. Al Womack has this fine organization feeding kids, educating kids, giving them something constructive to do, thus keeping them off the streets. That investment would come to us back many times over.

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