

## **Rural Infrastructure Assistance Program**

Testimony- January 19th, 2023

Good Afternoon and thank you for allowing me to testify on this important legislation. My name is Brian Carroll, I'm a retired public school administrator with a background and keen interest in organizational leadership. It is with this background, along with my 9 years as a Select board member in Glover, that I come to testify on behalf of the recommendations in the *BAA for \$3M for the Agency of Administration to develop a program to provide technical assistance to rural communities seeking ARPA-funded opportunities*. My family and I moved to the town of Glover 24 years ago. My wife and I often recall our first Town Meeting in 2000....it was like something out of a Hollywood movie, procedure, candor, humor, direct conversation.... Everything worked to apprise the people of the important budget decisions in order to run a small town. You had the moderator reading the articles and setting the procedures, a 3- member Select Board and the Town Clerk on stage providing the critical information for attendees to take a floor vote. It was pure democracy.

14 years later, I was elected to the SB and was pretty green to the practices of town government. For the first 2 years, I followed the lead of another board member who obviously had time to volunteer and lead projects like: construction of a new town garage, proposing a design for a 3 mile sewer line and creating an Energy Committee ( to name a few endeavors). I was still in a full-time job at that time and it was generally understood that my time was limited for taking on such a leadership role. In subsequent years, I gathered my footing and began facilitating my own discussions and decisions. Being an organizational wonk, I grew concerned with the idea that succeeding board members would almost need to be retired in order to get the people's work done. Eventually, turnover did occur and the board was forced to equally distribute the various responsibilities held by the 1 board member to all 3 board members... things like sewer, roads, dam management, human resources, technology, lake/environmental health. This new system appeared to be viable for a period of time... that time ended when COVID arrived. We now faced decisions involving life or death. It made us ask ourselves, what is our role to create and maintain a safe town environment? Should we require masking in our business? How do we conduct remote SB meetings? These discussions pushed the town government into areas that were more pressing and highlighted the challenges facing Glover.

Shortly after this period, the town was informed that it will directly receive over \$318,000 of ARPA money with some loose guidelines that initially related to affordable housing, child-care, economic development, employment, clean water, etc. Those big ticket needs outlined in the initial ARPA description were tough to wrap our heads around. We had

nowhere near the scale of infrastructure to address the needs. Eventually, the ARPA restrictions lessened and we faced the “conditioned opportunity” to basically use the funds as we please.

The SB did the diligent thing and created an ARPA committee and an application form. It was at this point that it became apparent that town was going to flounder in this endeavor unless there was a point person who could lead, organize a system, propose the application procedures, do the outreach to the community, kick-off the committee’s charge and inform the SB of the decisions made. After some reflection and research, it was decided to use the ARPA funds to create a facilitator, or Town Administrator, for a year, who would make ARPA funding, legal affairs, partner relationships and the town dam as priorities. This is when I stepped down from my elected office and assumed a very part-time role as TA. Realizing very few constituencies in small town Vermont enjoy the idea of hiring an administrator with tax funds for a small town, my hope was to do some experiential research, support the SB and provide data for the board and anyone else who would care to consider the organizational needs of Glover. As a result, I’ve supported the SB with completing the task of ARPA disbursements, managed the legal aspects of a quitclaim deed for the town (rather than using our attorney), Researched and provided basic technical assistance to the SB regarding policy development and to town committees regarding their charges, open meeting law, etc. and, worked with our technician to build a more accessible web site.

With these experiences along with excellent consultation from VLCT and NVDA related to small town governance infrastructure, the SB and I learned that, not only does the town require a full-time Town Administrator, it also needs the technical, organizational and leadership skills for sustaining growth as well as anticipating economic, climate and cultural challenges in the future. In short, Glover is on its way to achieving its goal of securing a full-time Town Administrator position. It now needs the financial resources to provide time, expertise and collaborative opportunities to build those systems and sustain leadership to achieve economic, cultural and recreational growth in our region.

Your support for this is critical for sustaining small towns in Vermont. Thank you.

Brian F. Carroll, Town Administrator  
Town of Glover, Vermont  
802.673.7149