

Oct. 13 – Kingdom Builders

17 people + Sen. Bizon

Comm. Herring, Szenda Wilson

Questions/discussion –

-Does lost revenue come from taxes?

-Where did the projects come from that are already allocated?

Staff explanation of lost revenue, ARPA buckets, vetting of PBB.

Concerns about where this information was online (person was on ARPA website and did not see projects), why the community has influence over so little of the \$30.5 million total ARPA dollars. Staff explain project recommendations, which are not yet authorized.

-Why city choosing to contribute to McCamly hotel, a historically bad cause. Don't understand who will benefit from that. Plenty of other defunct commercial buildings could serve the teaching purpose. Too much money into a luxury brand hotel, in a working class city. There are housing issues for the working poor that we need to address.

Segued into explaining hotel/motel shared kitchens.

Did the city give money to previous owners at any point? Make sure new owners have a vested interest in the city.

Questions about whether McCamly will pay taxes and who will own it. (Yes; locally owned)

-Question of how much influence the community has on feasibility of recommended projects.

-City hall entrance project – spending millions to beautify the building so people can pay bills.

Staff explained safety and accessibility.

-Can't we use \$5 million and increase worker pay?

Staff explained directly paying people is not an eligible ARPA expense, so we are forgiving utility bills.

-Would be nice if we could reopen Washington School.

Staff discussed The Village initiative focused on similar issues.

-City looks horrible, and there is nothing to do.

-Lot of community events and discussion, without community-influenced results. City listens, but doesn't do anything with what they hear.

Staff explained that commission asked us to go into community.

-Why can't all money discussed be in one pot?

-Stop focusing on downtown; bring money uptown.

-Nothing for young people – training children and giving them something to do that will prevent violence.

-Bishop Smith: People still fighting each other, and need to come together.

-We keep hearing from leaders about drawing people into Battle Creek; what about the people who have been here for generations?

Oct. 20 – Virtual

2,300 total reach; 19 peak live viewers

Comm. Morris, Reynolds

Questions/discussion –

FACEBOOK COMMENTS –

-Pandemic made internet gap very obvious; can we use ARPA to support efforts to get high-speed internet to all homes?

-Gaps in services for the un-homed and under-home. How about funds to improve the Share Center's ability to provide services?

-How about a program for small, local businesses to apply for direct rent/utility payments? (Did have RMAP program during pandemic for rental assistance.)

-Help people with high water bills.

-Subsidize public transit – increase bus routes and Tele-Transit options; improve bus stops.

-Discussion of ARPA dates related to lost funds calculation. (Spending from March 1, 2021-Dec. 31, 2024; lost revenue had to go back to 2019 because last fiscal pre-COVID)

-Will city have to pay back ARPA funds? Will it cause debt for the community's taxpayers?

-Who is doing the equity audit and how is it happening?

-How can community partners get involved if they are not already?

CALLERS/OTHER SOCIAL –

-How will the funding program impact small business?

-SHARE Center – Robert – un-homed, vulnerable, mental illness, ALICE are folks served. Lot of families in “hotel limbo.” Put some money into eviction diversion, rent application fees/deposits, other services we try to provide to these families. Meals, case management, basic needs resources – diapers, clothing, pet food.

Oct. 20 – Washington Heights United Methodist Church

20-25 attendees

Comm. Herring, Reynolds

Questions/discussions –

-Food deserts – support need for healthy food in Washington Heights (350 families per week in need)

-Vacant school buildings as affordable housing

Pastor French interested in participating in affordable housing work.

-Improving life for seniors 65+ (activities, meals, housing, etc.)

-More land for urban farming

-Eliminate the hotel owned by the Church of Scientology

-Big support for broadband project

-Idea to forgive Willard Library overdue fees

-Request for John Hart to join ARPA conversations

-High priority for “true” community centers

-Worry that Battle Creek water will become a Flint situation.

-Surveillance cameras – some think this is a violation of privacy and targets Black communities.

Oct. 27 – New Level Sports Ministries

31 people

Comm. Herring, Morris, Reynolds, Szenda Wilson

Questions/discussion –

-How did ideas get on the recommended project list? How were priority projects forwarded so quickly?

-Pastor McCoy – Youth Village a big project, by the people, and noted #1 on a survey done. Concerned about why we are not on that list. (Staff explained this was city-driven.) Youth Village is not new; has been on Rebecca's desk.

-Stormwater survey for Upton Avenue area – does not include funding to actually fix it? Where will that come from?

-Once the city finalizes use of funds, can the community prioritize the projects? (Staff explained city commission will approve these.)

-Comm. Herring talked to crowd about PBB survey, noting how few filled it out. Jessica talked to crowd about communications and how information distributed. Ideas given about coming to organizations like New Level to discuss surveys that are out.

NPC 2 has shown that the way to get the word out to people is door-to-door and face-to-face.

-Child and family programs – need to motivate and help kids while they are young.

-Like to see momentum to beautify the West Michigan Avenue corridor leading into downtown.

-Like to see projects different from the city list, and present the community requests before the city projects.

-Explain city general fund.

-Feedback loop – community has been surveyed and studied, with many of the same results and answers, but things have not happened.

-Transportation for kids all over, not just Washington Heights, the Burmese, and Lakeview. New Level is learning Spanish and bringing people together, strengthening the community.

-Hold community conversations periodically, not about specific ideas, but just general, in different locations.

-Accessibility issues, from a blind neighbor.

Nov. 3 – Lakeview Square Mall

About 12 people

Comm. Morris, Szenda Wilson, Reynolds, Blood, Herring

Questions/discussion –

-Big issue is transportation – need coordination with schools and after-school programs.

Apply transportation dollars directly to students? Huge attendance problem when students don't have stable homes, might be living far from their school, and can't get there.

Glad city approved hotel/motel kitchen project.

-Kudos for a substantial project list. "All of these programs clearly are needed." Make sure we do whatever we can to reach the most people in our population.

-McCamly has hurt Battle Creek and downtown – make sure we have people in the city monitoring and reviewing that constantly, because it is such a large amount of money.

-Morris asked about PBB survey – four people raised their hands that they completed it.

-There are opportunities to create culture and art in Battle Creek – especially for youth. People don't have fun in Battle Creek. Some don't want the Cereal City moniker anymore.

When collecting input, important to get youth voice. Town hall meeting is not the way to do that. Also opinion that town halls are great, but not to reach younger generation. They need to be heard at least once a month. Show up and have one-on-one conversations. Have a feedback loop – how can a 16-year-old give feedback to you so you know what they are thinking in real time?

Create an art council here – Battle Creek has not had one in over a decade, and it shows. Record labels, artists, dance teachers – those on the ground need support.

Host a youth town hall meeting.

-Kristyn Denison, NIBC – Hearing about housing here, and we are working with homeless, putting them into housing and hotels. Working with people being evicted. Working on transitional home process for the homeless.

-Will Summit Pointe and services be involved in Dolliver project?

-Broadband is so important to everything.

-Language access needs – also at schools/school board meetings. No handouts here in Spanish or Burmese. Need equity training.

-People have to feel safe – status issue, not race. A lot of people don't feel polished enough to attend a meeting like this. Need to uplift leaders already doing the work.

-Need to know where to go for information... sometimes see an activity in the paper that looks good, but it is described as already happening, so I'm too late.

-Recycling is very confusing. We need feedback on what we are doing. Uncertainty is a concern. My yogurt cup isn't in the picture, so do I recycle it?

Nov. 10 – Burma Center with live interpretation

23 people

Comm. Reynolds, Blood, Herring

Questions/discussion –

-Tha – Burmese population has dropped from about 3,000 to about 2,000 – a concern. Burma Center asking for \$300,000 as part of a capital campaign to address building needs. Most urgently need heat and HVAC upgrades.

The Center is thriving. We need more partnership from the community to attract Burmese. How do we invest to prepare for additional refugees after the coup in Burma?

Other support for Tha's requests for Burma Center, and how they have provided for the community during the pandemic.

-Issue of communication in other languages; ability to respond in real time in languages other than English.

-Can Battle Creek ARPA money be used in Springfield? [Burma Center in City of Springfield – and YES]

-Burma Center co-chair – support Tha. Developed a baseline for broadband?

-McCamly – what considerations for including Burmese community with Grand Valley, with language barriers. What is the pathway for community to get into this program? Scholarship opportunities?

Remember Reconnect program at KCC – tuition program.

-First Baptist pastor – Support Tha. Some feel separated from community; have talked to John Hart about this. How do we become part of community development?

How to continue support, because churches have stepped up to provide during the pandemic (Rebecca).

-Option for translation when people call 311?

Nov. 17 – Lamora Park Elementary

Two attendees

Comm. Blood, Morris

Questions/discussion –

-Conversation about entitlement community, projects already approved, other priority projects

-A lot of paperwork for hotels and motels to participate in kitchen program?

-Are farmers eligible for essential worker pay? [Do not think so, but grocery workers would be]

-ARPA money earning interest? [Yes, and do not have to use that interest on ARPA projects]

-Idea of transportation out to the factories, and transportation issues generally.

-Glad to see City Hall on project list – get the fence down.

-Something for kids to do – more organized programs and recreation activities, like baseball leagues in some of the parks. Tutoring, after-school programs to engage kids. Use ARPA dollars to organize and catalyze.

Issue of child care – during the pandemic, have to work and can't support kids. They are left alone without engagement.

Nov. 30 – Café Rica youth conversation

About 20 people + four Café Rica staff

Comm. Szenda Wilson, Herring

Questions/discussion –

-More bus routes.

-A few people knew what ARPA was, by show of hands. Rebecca explained how bad pandemic is right now, as related to ARPA funds.

-Ability to pay essential workers like school bus drivers – Pennfield just off for two weeks because of a shortage.

If looking for transportation solutions, look at things like dial-a-ride that already work well across places like Marshall and Albion. Hate to see millions go into something that's going to fail.

-Potential partnership with public schools related to the hotel management at McCamly?

-Food deserts/food security an issue across the city. How help food success right in downtown? Grocery stores have closed and moved to south side. What is the city's plan to compensate for these negligent decisions?

-Interested in urban farming, more programs for backyard chickens, and teaching people how to garden and raise chickens. Consider changes – can only have four chickens, but have a family of seven.

-Talked about process for submitting ideas.

-Look at recreation improvements.

-What is missing and what does city need? – more art/youth programs; any type of youth programming to help with professional development while in high school; revamp musical theater community; food accessibility (use part of McCamly for incubator space, community center, etc.); something more amusing and fun to do (one of biggest needs in YAC surveys)

-Create more spaces to share – less direct talking to youth. Connection between youth conversations and the city. People lack internet and connection, and knowledge, like what ward they are in. Reach out to youth more, hear them, invite them to meetings.

-Hear people's issues and take them seriously. Lot of people on the ground working already; we need to fill gaps.

-Subsidize small business startups in current downtown spaces – possibly buy out properties owned by people who no longer live in Battle Creek/transition those to local ownership

-Tiffany Blackman, Bread & Basket LLC owner – invest in a downtown retail incubator like Bread & Basket that also has maker space and arts. B&B could expand to help the community, and already hosts events related to art and creativity

-Address all negative impacts to employment and college-aged students. Subsidize small businesses that hire and train young adults, like Umami Ramen, Café Rica, Plumeria, and others.

-Fund stipends for startup businesses recovering from the pandemic, and need space or flexibility in rebuilding or starting their business that is not loan-based, like a shared space concept. Find a building to lease to help, like with LK Ventures at 70 E. Michigan, or other empty spaces downtown, like the old toy store, old drug store, Milton retail spaces, etc.

Dec. 1 – Kool Family Center with Voces

Earpiece interpretation in Spanish

About 20 people

Comm. Reynolds

Questions/discussion –

-Who pays for translation/interpretation if someone needs that to talk to their commissioner?

-Concerns about less city staff, particularly in Planning.

-How funds can impact economic development.

-Certain populations have not qualified for personal stimulus money, and are still struggling. Can some money be focused on those people? Keep in mind those who do not qualify.

-With infrastructure bill approved, wait to see how we can use those funds, so that maybe we can use ARPA funds recommended for infrastructure elsewhere (like City Hall renovations). [Did get state appropriation for City Hall specifically.]

-Saw someone post about receiving water shutoff notice. Staff explained that the notices still go out so customers know where they stand on bills – still not shutting off for non-payment, and may never again. Have ARPA project for utility bills, and just today learned about state program to help with this.

When they get shut-off notices, is there information about where to get assistance, who to ask for?

-How about funding community navigators who can help people in other languages to get information in more real time?

-Use funds for parents who can't afford child care?

-Use funds for Latino-centric location? We have Voces, but that is not always appropriate for certain things, or large group gathering.

-Transportation a need – Latino community doesn't always get what they need. Community Action doesn't have Spanish speakers, so that is not helpful. Specifically a need for transportation to appointments, when the person might not know when they need a ride home.

Nothing on the project list related to transportation – intersectional need for many communities.

Some sort of city identification that will help people feel safe riding transportation systems, when they do not have a state/government ID. Ensure proper resources for people who don't speak English. Also train drivers related to equity and trauma, so they do not call police on passengers because of bias.

-Public lighting issue on Highway Street – staff connecting afterward to submit to Consumers

-Kingman Museum director/board – Discussed 68 percent lost revenue and moving out of previous building to preserve the collection. Nationally 1 in 3 museums have permanently closed. Important for

cultural identity and education. Requesting funds to identify and plan for a new home location, maybe in downtown. Also help with fundraising.

Discussion of program and collaboration with Northwestern, approved for an arts school.

Support for reopening in Battle Creek, so there is a museum and learning opportunity for families in Battle Creek, and people don't have to go to Kalamazoo and Jackson for such opportunities.

-Look at funding for schools and community to help with language accessibility. Kids are less comfortable speaking their home language because using English at school, and parents are shy to attend meetings and programs because they do not speak English. Teaching dual languages earlier will help all to be included.

-Make McCamly environmentally friendly.

-Invest in people who do not have homes, but also home owners. Incentivize them to be in Battle Creek. Some are undocumented and pay for their homes in cash. They get called out with code violations and can't fix their homes. How do we support our neighbors?

ARPA TOWN HALL MEETING OVERALL THEMES

How was the project list developed, and level of community influence

McCamly project - likely hot because of contribution amount, mention as priority project then approved, bad history

Lack of things to do - for youth specifically
Programs and training for youth, recreation opportunities
Support art and culture

Need feedback loops between city and community when we ask for input and receive it
Hear people's struggles and take them seriously
Invite input

Needs for small businesses

Broadband support

Transportation - for work, for appointments, subsidized, for children/students; coordination with schools; more bus routes; language access

Food accessibility needs / access to neighborhood food resources

Language access needs - for youth/schools; Burmese; Latinx; workforce programs; transportation; safety

Issue of pay for essential workers, and how to support the most people who are struggling