

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) PUBLIC INPUT REPORT



Background

The American Rescue Plan (ARPA) passed by Congress and signed into law by President Biden on March 2021, is a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus package. In this law, state and local governments receive a total of \$350 billion in assistance. Polk County is set to receive a total of \$95.2 million.

The Board of Supervisors will focus on four key areas for long-term strategic investment: Affordable Housing, Economic Well-Being, Water Quality, and Mental Health. Funds cannot be used to reduce property taxes.

In fall 2021, Polk County began soliciting public input for best use of the roughly \$95.2 million ARPA funds. The public input process includes public forums, board/staff discussions, work groups, and through an online survey and question/comment form. This report combines public input received through the online survey and the question/comment form to aid in further discussion on the use of these funds.

Executive Summary

The online survey netted 579 responses of which nearly all were Polk County residents from all parts of Polk County with greater participation in Western and Central Des Moines. Nearly half of the respondents were 65 years or older with 35-44 year olds with the second highest tally. Roughly 87% were white and nearly two-thirds were female. Below are the top subcategory respondents selected out of each key area:

- Affordable Housing: Create permanent supportive housing options for low income individuals & those experiencing homelessness
- Economic Well-Being: Affordable Childcare
- Water Quality: Identifying and replacing lead pipes
- Mental Health: near even spread among all three options—addiction support, community outreach, expanding mobile crisis

In addition, respondents were able to provide short answer responses to questions which were pulled from the online survey and the online comment/question form. Like comments were categorized and subcategorized based on the four key areas, including a fifth section for comments not in a key area. Below is a synopsis of themes among the four key areas based on public comments.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) PUBLIC INPUT REPORT



Affordable Housing

- Increasing affordable housing/rental units for lower- to middle-income earners— Focusing on 30-50% area median income (AMI), working folks where market rate rents are too high.
- Housing disparities and inequities with a focus on marginalized individuals— Programs that are fair to everyone, extra assistance or housing programs for migrants, people of color, disabled people, and people who are undocumented, single mothers
- Seniors—property tax freeze or reduction, help with energy bills, home maintenance, more affordable 55+ rental units
- Weatherization, energy, home improvements—energy efficiency retrofits & upgrades and home repair through grants or forgivable loans
- Homelessness—Build tiny homes, public housing, permanent shelter with treatment
- Eviction Prevention/Rental Assistance—Emergency rent payment program, legal representation for those facing eviction
- Affordable Housing Developers—Encourage and fund more building of affordable housing
- Education—Home financing, maintenance education
- Direct Payment/Excluded Worker Fund—Direct payments to those who may not have received stimulus payments

Economic Well-Being

- Help marginalized/impooverished/most in need/living on the margins—provide economic relief, support, and programs to those most in need
- Direct Payments/Excluded Worker Fund/Essential Worker Pay/Wages—Direct payments to those who may not have received stimulus payments, workers who lost money during the shutdown, those who still can't return to work now, monthly checks
- Nurses—Invest in nursing workforce with training, wrap-around support, scholarships, living stipends
- Seniors—home repair, lawn/snow services, increased food benefits, healthcare/prescription assistance
- Workforce/Training/Schooling—Reduce barriers for immigrants & refugees, create job opportunities for previous offenders to reduce recidivism, return to work assistance & programs, education for the underserved
- Small Business—Business incubator systems for non-white and low-income, grants for small businesses

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) PUBLIC INPUT REPORT

- Children—Childcare assistance, public childcare program, assistance for marginalized children
- Food—better, healthier food options

Water Quality

- Buffer Zones/Watershed/Agricultural Practices—Create buffer strips, wetlands, fund changes in agricultural practices that lead to water quality improvements
- Safe Drinking Water—extra attention on water quality for marginalized, no cost home water testing and solutions, assure sufficient supply during drought years
- Flood Mitigation—flood preparedness and prevention
- Infrastructure—Sewer maintenance, green infrastructure for more resiliency in the face of increased flooding
- Education—public awareness, legislature education

Mental Health

- Increase mental health professionals through scholarships/training—Increase the number of bilingual and culturally competent mental health professionals with a scholarship program that includes a living stipend with requirement to work in Polk County, focus on minorities
- Youth—mental health services for those in K-12 and child care, suicide prevention, adolescent addiction, subsidize therapists for public schools, affordable/obtainable/accessible childcare and mental health care.
- Mobile Crisis/Police—Send mental health service professional to mental health crises, not police officers, training police to better handle and recognize mental health crises, reallocation of police funds
- Mental Health Resources Accessibility/Outreach/Public Education—Unable to find reliable and professional resources for counseling, public education to remove stigma, local hotlines, free/low cost counseling support, expand services
- Substance/Drug Abuse Treatment—Dedicated residential facilities for long-term intensive intervention, reduce homelessness through supportive mental health care and drug addiction treatment centers, invest in harm reduction for drug users
- Seniors—Services for older adults, those specifically for isolated seniors affected by the impact of COVID-19.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) PUBLIC INPUT REPORT



Comments not in a key area

- Climate/Environment—Reduce carbon footprint by planting more trees, establishing solar areas, increase public transportation, create green jobs
- Infrastructure—Street, sewer, bridge repairs, improve traffic
- Arts—Support cultural and local arts, music groups & organizations
- Transparency—Use money wisely, honestly, full transparency as to its use, continue public meetings with virtual option
- COVID-19 pandemic—Improving indoor air quality, awareness campaign, vaccination incentives, provide high quality masks