

Date: 7/5/2023

To: Energy Committee members

From: Somara Zwick

Subject: Summary of information from 6/27 meeting with Margo Ghia, WRC (M.E.R.P. coordinator for Windham County)

I met with Margo via Zoom on June 27<sup>th</sup> (as discussed at our last EC meeting) and got a bunch of information from her about both our initial mini-grant application and the next phases of the MERP program, plus planning for what else might be coming grant-wise down the road for the next few years.

**ADA Compliance requirement:**

One of the questions I asked was, what will qualify our buildings being ADA compliant for this grant. Her answer was that guidelines from the agency are still needed. Margo advised we talk to our town attorney to get the general specs. However, she also stated that up to 20% of any awarded implementation grant may be used to do ADA compliance work if needed to comply with the grant terms.

**Mini-grant Specific uses of the \$4,000 award (Phase 1):**

We can use some of these funds for any consultants – eg. solar potential sites, ADA compliance needs, education & outreach in our community. Fairly broad interpretation of what is allowed, but mini-grant funds may NOT be used for any implementation – eg., we can't buy any materials, equipment, etc.

**When will we find out if we're awarded the mini – grant:**

Margo said the first round March applicants for mini grants were notified in May, but she hoped our application would get reviewed and we'd get notice faster. She explained that the agency was just putting things in place and "learning as we go" about administering this program.

**Assessment/Energy Audits (Phase 2):**

This will be the next phase for us to start planning now. The BGS (agency) says audit/assessment applications will be coming out relatively soon, meaning by early fall. We will need to have our ducks in a row to complete the application including:

- Prioritization of our Town buildings
- Level of audit we will ask for – Level 1 or Level 2
  - Level 1 audit is a simple walk-through of a building
  - Level 2 audit is more complex, will require 3-5 years utility use, architectural plans, etc. and which will include insulation(blow) tests, etc.
- Audits are free done by BGS contractors

**TIMING OF OUR FILLING APPLICATION FOR ASSESSMENT WILL BE CRITICAL.** We want to file the application as soon as we can to make sure we are in the queue to be assigned an assessor quickly.

The level of audit desired doesn't have to be the same for each building. Audits don't trigger ADA requirements. Margo said there is an email re. Level 1 vs Level 2 requirements that she will email me.

She suggested we gather as much info as possible to prep for this grant plus others that may be in the pipeline for the next few years. She said, technically the plans are supposed to be done by end of 2023

(ie, 1/2024), but stated this is not likely, because the agency hasn't even sent out applications yet and it will be too short a time for towns to comply.

**Phase 2 Cont'd:**

IMPORTANT NOTE: They will only fund projects listed in the audit reports. Therefore, if there's a project or equipment we want, we should mention it to our auditor/assessor so that it be put in the auditors report.

**Implementation of Project (Phase 3)**

After we receive our assessment/audit, we will be able to apply for an implementation grant. Once we are awarded implementation grant money it must be committed by 2026 (I need to ask if that means we have contracts signed, etc) and completed/built by 2028. This is similar to other ARPA money requirements.

Weatherization projects will be the likely funded projects such as new windows, insulation, etc. They are less likely to fund larger cost equipment such as solar panels, etc. but if we want them we should be sure to put it in the report – especially if other funding becomes available. Margo said there is likely additional funding from the State within the next couple of years.

Again, up to 20% of an implementation award may go to ADA work.

**Other information:**

Both a level 1 & 2 will allow application for the implementation Grants. But there will also be a loan fund available for the implementation work and to be eligible for these funds we must have level 2 assessment.

Margo @ WRC is our resource for information & questions, we can contact her anytime. She has added me (Somara) to her email distribution list when BGS sends out any new info. MERP pays WRC for this, there is no extra charge to the town.

The implementation grant does not cover project management by WRC.