

**Porter County American Rescue Plan  
Sub Committee Non Profits & Employers  
Tuesday, May 16, 2022, 5 p.m.  
Commissioners' Meeting Room Chambers  
Porter County Administration Center 155 Indiana Ave., Valparaiso IN 46383**

**Members Present:**

Jim Biggs  
Mike Brickner  
Erik Wagner  
Ruth Vance  
Rebecca Tomerlin

Jim Biggs opened the meeting and advised tonight the committee will hear four applications.

**Motion:** Jim Biggs moved to approve the April 25, 2022 minutes. Erik Wagner seconded and so approved by a 5-0 vote.

**Presentations:**

Each organization has 15 minutes for their presentation. There will be 15 minutes for Q & A after the presentation.

**Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater NWI**

Ryan Smiley presented. Also with him was Shire Kuch. Their Board has made a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. The Valparaiso Club opened in 1970. In 2018 they merged Lake and Porter County. They have 10 facilities. They are the largest Boys and Girls organization in the State of Indiana. The new building is set to open on May 31<sup>st</sup>. It is a \$9 Million project. They have raised \$8.7 million. They received \$150,000 in ARPA funds from the City of Valparaiso towards that project. They recently renovated their Hammond Club. They had a 45% decrease in attendance due to COVID. In the three clubs they have renovated they have had a 35% increase in attendance.

Shire Kuch discussed the financial impact of COVID. From 2019 to 2020 they saw a 10% decrease in earned revenue which is about a \$200,000 decrease. During this time they saw a 15% increase in expenses. On March 13<sup>th</sup> the Club shut down. They retained 90% of their employees. They set up a parent hot line, an e-learning hot line, virtual programming at home and served over 263,000 meals. They have received two PPP loans which have been forgiven. They received three COVID grants. One from Lily Endowment for over \$300,000. One from Porter County Community Foundation and Legacy Foundation for \$10,000 and \$20,000 respectively. The Indiana Department of Education awarded them a \$4.1 million reimbursable grant over the course of 18 months. A condition of the grant was to sign an MOU to share data

with 11 school districts across both counties. They will be tracking kids and communicating with them to prove the impact in order to be reimbursed over the next 18 months if they are able to perform to the standards and metrics they said they would. They received ARPA Funds from the City of Valparaiso for the new project.

They are requesting \$4 Million to touch all four of the facilities in Porter County. Each has matching funds already committed. The Portage match is pending from Eli Lily and is a statewide grant. They know that a \$1.00 investment in a Boys and Girls Club gives a \$9.60 lifetime return on investment. This is driven through parental increased earnings, increased grades and reduction in alcohol and drug use in kids. Every year the County is giving out over \$4 million to four other non-profits in the County. They feel their one-time request of \$4 million is a realistic approach.

Q – Have they received any commitments for ARPA funds in Lake County?

A – They have a written commitment for up to \$10 Million from a municipality that would match another \$10 Million from a private contribution. Porter County funds would not be used in Lake County.

Q – How much did you get from the City of Valparaiso?

A - \$150,000.

Q – Did you get any other ARPA funds from a Porter County municipality?

A – No.

Q – How is your request in proportion to your losses from COVID? Did you lose \$4 million?

A – They have not lost \$4 million. Between the loss in revenue and increase in expenses it is probably one-half of that. The big thing is loss of kids. With the renovations, they will increase the numbers.

Q – You touched on delivering meals. How did you do that?

A – They had a grant and partners.

### **Neighbors' Educational Opportunities**

Rebecca Reiner presented along with Jerry Czarnecki. This organization has taken over the services that were offered by Portage Adult Education for 49 years. Over the years they have overcome many challenges. The projects they are proposing are aimed at closing the gap in disparity. NEO's economic impact was \$1 million. The pandemic did also increase their costs. Those costs were: additional employee compensation for being around students as they were filtering in and out, additional COVID days, remote and hybrid instruction, additional professional development to support the teachers. They needed to purchase new technology. They had to purchase a new HVAC system. They had to purchase PPE equipment. They

increased student support with a counselor to work with students and families and issues they had to deal with due to the pandemic. They also increased their tutoring. They extended their on-line learning support along with summer and evening support.

They received two PPP loans that were forgiven. They received some of the Federal money that was allocated to schools. Those funds were used as intended and they kept all 45 of their employees. They refinanced a mortgage to a savings of \$75,000 per year. They brought a solar field to their facility. They have recruited volunteers. Their student enrollment is increasing. The Camelot Nature Academy cost is \$267,057 and is a 3,000 sf building. The building is the former Camelot bowling alley. This will allow them to provide nature studies. The child care spots will be open to the community and students. A sliding fee scale is provided to help retain teachers that are leaving the profession because they cannot afford child care. This program will provide a great yield on the investment.

The next proposal is the NEO Training Academy. The cost of this project is \$1,674,687. They already have an empty 10,000 sf building. Plans are already drawn up for the build out of this building. This would bring increased training opportunities in collaboration with IVY Tech, Porter County Career, VU, and Workforce Development. They have training developed. The first phase will be to get the infrastructure in place. Then work with the partners to determine what gaps need to be filled. They will meet the timeline deadlines required. Her budget presented is proportional with the students they serve in Porter County. They have 43% matching funds. This is a onetime ask that will have a long-lasting effect on the community. It is a realistic and attainable plan for sustainability.

C – This application came in early and provided the Board with the right kind of information. Portage school system does not provide adult education. This makes the decision very easy. It is a strong application.

Q – If you were offered less would you take it?

A - Yes. They will look at donations and more of an allocation of their own resources.

Q – You can meet the deadlines?

A – Yes. This is something that was in the works before the pandemic hit. Now they are ready to start this and get moving.

Q – Your application came in through the portal asking for \$1.5 Million. What is the ask now?

A - \$1,106,794. That is 57% of the total budget.

Q – If this Board were to award money it would be used in Porter County?

A – The facility is a Portage facility. It is a Porter County resource.

Q – Did you request ARPA money from the City of Portage?

A – Yes. They have been unofficially awarded. They have hinted at \$100,000 to \$200,000. They were turned down by the Valparaiso City Council.

Q – What is the debt on your real estate now?

A - They received a loan from the State and 1<sup>st</sup> Source. That was for about \$4.5 Million. They are down to about \$3 Million now.

Q – What do you perceive as your way of meeting your debt?

A – They have a threshold of a breakeven number and they are now exceeding that number. They know they will be ok. They have clean audits. They have not defaulted on any loan. Both projects will open them up to increased partnerships and donations that will elevate their status and value to the region. They have to follow all of the same compliance requirements as any other public school. They do not get any tax dollars. For most school corporations, that tax money is about one-third of their operating budget.

### **Porter County Project Kids**

Cynthia Wold presented. This project is for the regular population. They exist solely to deal with issues from the pandemic. They are a non-profit. They also fit under the category of assistance to households. They have two missions. Children were impacted by covid. She has seen the level of anger, anxiety and depression rise. Maybe these kids need better role models around them. Her mission is to help children and see what can be done to normalize their life. Also to bring adults together and help put some of the hostility behind them. This is working. The sensory paths cost \$1,500 each. There is no way she could afford to do this on her own. She reached out and got donors. She applied to be a nonprofit and did receive that from the State. She applied to the IRS and she got a 501 c 3. Her vice president is Dr. Elizabeth Campbell. Her treasurer is Stephanie Leonard who is a branch manger of one of the TCU Credit Unions. Her secretary is Vanessa. The concept behind the sensory paths is movement. The brain cannot function without movement.

Q – Are you trying to get into all elementary schools?

A – She had hit a pause. Dr. Campbell sent out follow up letters. There are 15 schools that have ordered. Of those, 6 are ready to install.

Q – How have you been impacted by COVID.

A - The Pads are needed because of COVID. They help the children.

Q – When did you become a nonprofit.

A – The end of last year. We are all volunteers. They have \$15,000 for a matching fund.

C – One of the requirements is that they have to be formed prior to COVID.

A – She thinks that applies to other groups. She believes she meets the requirements.

### **Shirley Heinze Land Trust**

Kris Krouse presented. Shirley Heinze has been preserving land since 1981. Another component of their group is to engage people in conservation and nature. They are headquartered at Meadowbrook Nature Preserve. They have preserved 2,700 acres of land and over 1,000 are in Porter County. They have made all, if possible, publicly accessible. In 2018 they received the National Excellence Award. Meadowbrook is 220 acres in size. They have planted over 30,000 trees. The property has four miles of trails. They are in the early stages of developing an agriculture and water program. They have youth and adult programs. Right before covid they had over 200 students from TJ removing the tree tubes they had planted. In 2019 they developed a master plan. Their funding request is two parts. The first page is to construct an amphitheater. This would have a pathway to get back to the

amphitheater, a ramp for handicap access to the stage, restroom facility and open space for people to congregate. Their goal is to increase visitation. This would be an enhanced visitor experience. There would be free programs for all ages. There are health and wellness benefits of connecting communities to nature.

Part B of their project is an addition to Meadowbrook. It would bring the preserve up to 300 acres in size. There are about 23 acres of wetland and forested land. Approximately 50 acres is farmland. They will leave it agriculture. This project will also help with water quality improvements.

They are prepared to do a challenge fundraiser. They believe they will be able to raise \$250,000 in matching funds. This would reduce their original funding request by \$350,000. They have a great track record. They do not rely on tax dollars. They have a lot of partners on the county level, businesses and a lot of people who would benefit from this project. They are able to meet all of the timeline deadlines. They have \$2.75 million in acquisition, restoration and capital projects.

Q – Is Meadowbrook open to the public?

A – Yes.

Q – Are there trails all through there?

A – Yes. Four miles of trails.

Q – Do you charge an entrance fee?

A – No. We do not charge a fee for anyone to access any of our preserves.

Q – Do you allow pets?

A – We do if on a leash. They have partnered with Lakeshore Paws in the past for an outdoor event.

Q – This is the old girl scout camp?

A – Yes. When we acquired it, it had not been used in quite some time.

Q – The other properties shown, the public has access to them as well?

A – Yes.

C – Preserving open space is one of the things that makes Porter County so attractive. This targets a wide range of individuals.

A – To have a place where people can come together and see farming and learn about it is another way they are being innovative.

C – Besides being nonprofit you would fit in the tourism industry. With that the harm is presumed.

A – Ecotourism is important. They are not a membership organization. They maintain the properties and they are open to anyone for free. They need donations to exist.

C – Jim Biggs stated out of all the years he has been in the Commissioner's office, there has never been a request from Shirley Heinze Foundation.

Q – What is your relationship with other nature preserves?

A – In 2018 they did a conservation plan with the Porter County Park Department and Indiana DNR. They have a very good working relationship. In 2005 they purchased some property and then transferred it to DNR.

Q – Are you trying to collaborate with Pinney Purdue or Purdue?

A – He recently was at a Pinney Purdue day. He has relationships with people at Purdue.

May 23<sup>rd</sup> is the scoring meeting. There will not be public input.

**Public Comment -**

Rebecca Reiner asked about the time frame from here? Vicki Urbanik and Jim Biggs stated the Steering Committee is planning to meet in June with recommendations to the Commissioners by the end of June.

Dawn asked about Federal funds NEO received. The reply was \$450,000.

There being no one else wishing to address the Committee, Jim Biggs declared the Public Comment section closed.

Vicki Urbanik advised the next agenda will have every project listed and their new amount requested.

The meeting adjourned.