

THE NEW HARMONY GAZETTE - SPECIAL ADVANCE ARTICLE

EARLY ALERT FROM COUNCILWOMAN LORA ARNERG - HARMONY SCHOOL.

By: Dan Barton

June 2024

OR - HAS THE CHICKEN COME HOME TO ROOSTE?

In May, I received a cell phone call from Councilwoman Lora Arneberg about two grants that the Town of New Harmony were to receive. One for improved WIFI service and the other for monies for purchasing back the old New Harmony School property.

It should be noted that at the April 24, 2024 meeting of the New Harmony Town Council, Councilwoman Arneberg remarked that the former school property would be ideal for future housing, as it is not in the Flood Plain.

The following is what we discussed.

To: Councilwoman Arneberg

From: New Harmony Gazette Publisher, Dan Barton

May 14, 2024

Dear Councilwoman Arneberg:

“First of all, I’d like to thank you for contacting me yesterday, Monday, May 13, 2024, about the two Grants you spoke of that will undoubtedly be of great benefit to the Town of New Harmony, once received and implemented by you and the Council. However, I must ask you to email me the details of those two Grants and what you and the Council propose to use them for.

“Unfortunately, Cell Phones and I do not get along. My hearing these days is next to nothing, one ear entirely deaf and the other functions at about 50%, that’s why you don’t see me at any meetings. My hearing is officially a disabling condition per the Veterans Administration. So, I must ask you to email me the details of the two Grants that you spoke of, how much and from whom, etc., etc.

“I recall that you said something about them being, one for \$50,000 and the other being \$200,000, but from whom, I did not get. Also, I recall that you said something about the \$50,000 going for town WIFI and I’d like the details on that program, since I have no idea how it would benefit New Harmony. The other monies, \$200,000 I believe you said could possibly go for repurchasing the old school property, of which I think you said something about using the property for affordable housing. I’d like the details on that since the costs will go way beyond \$200,000 to develop into housing. My last question is, when and where did you say the meeting on these matters would be held and if it is a closed Executive type meeting or is its open to the public. I won’t be there for reasons that I stated above, but just in case someone asks me, I’ll have an answer. Sincerely, Dan Barton”

To: Dan Barton

From: Councilwoman Arneberg

May 14, 2024

“Dan, the county council held a special meeting last week to allocate remaining federal ARPA funds within the county. Several projects from New Harmony were presented to the county council and they chose the two below for funding based on the spending restrictions and goals for ARPA funds. Both grants will be from the county to the town of New Harmony.

“\$25,000 - downtown data - the first grant will be for installing hardware for a Downtown data signal at Main and Church Street - It will basically be a wifi cloud for our downtown core. This is a project that has been researched over several years by various people for the benefit of Visitors and Local’s in our downtown core. Especially during festivals when we have many visitors with poor cell signal and /or vendors, who can’t process credit cards it will also be very beneficial. It will support all data features on mobile devices.

“\$200,000 - the second Grant is for the town purchasing the school property. This property will be sold in the next few years, and I strongly believe the community should be able to decide what happens to this important piece of property. The school sits on about 30 acres of land, which is in the only large tract in the town boundary and not in the flood plain. Which makes it the only large tract of land we have to grow our community - in whatever way we decide to do so. The town also still has \$100,000 from the original sale of the property available as matching funds for this purchase.

“This could be housing, green space, a community center, or various options in the school. But if the town can secure the ownership of the land, at least we get to decide what will happen there in the future. If this land is sold into the private market, I think we have to consider the unfortunate possibility that the school building would just continue to degrade over the years.

“There will be a public meeting coming up specifically to discuss the re-purchase of the school property but I don’t have a date on that yet. I will definitely let you know when that is decided. It also works out very well for timing that the town is getting ready to redo their comprehensive plan because this will no doubt be an important piece of the future of the community if the purchase goes through.

“Aside from public input about purchasing the property, the final terms of the sale will have to be negotiated with the seller as well. So nothing will happen immediately. We just have an exciting opportunity to consider.

“Let me know if you have any follow-up questions. And thank you for helping to spread the word. It’s important that the community have an opportunity to be informed and express their opinions on this opportunity. Love Arneberg”

The last statement by Lora Arneberg is very important my fellow citizens - “It’s important that the community have an opportunity to be informed and express their opinions on this opportunity.” Indeed, the future of New Harmony is in your hands, ladies and gentlemen. Be sure you don’t let it pass you by.

Though I was surprised at the announcement by Councilwoman Arneberg about the \$200,000 and concerned that it was never discussed in a public meeting before it was applied for and what was planned to do with it, I’m still glad that she notified me when she did.

After all, it should not have been surprise that she intends to use this money for a housing development on school property, she made this pronouncement when she ran for the Council seat last fall. She received received 210 votes in last November's election, second only to Jeff Smotherman, which tells me that this is what the townspeople of New Harmony want, overwhelmingly.

Here are some of the public statements that Lora Arneberg made on the run-up to the November elections:

"I want to grow the town, ensure it's future, and bring the voice of younger families to the council."

"I would love to see us go after more grants, especially for quality of place projects that can bring amenities to the community to grow the great place we already have. My focus would be growth - more amenities, more housing..."

"We need more housing for current residents and potential new citizens."

"We need more housing. For every house I have, we have at least 10 requests for housing that we can't fill. If we want this community and our tax base to grow we have to support those who want to bring new development to town."

"We need to encourage building and have ways to incentivize and assist those interested in creating new housing."

Publisher's Note: If you, the citizens, want to be a part of the Town Council process and have knowledge of what is going on, you must attend meetings, that's the only way you can be part of what's truly going on in New Harmony.

Hopefully, more on this development in the July issue of The New Harmony Gazette!