

**Agenda Item 6. Suggestions for ARPA funds to support Washoe County elder community
Submitted by Donna Clontz, Senior Advisory Board Associate Member**

I support the broad categories listed on the agenda for this item. Following are my additional comments and ideas.

Washoe County's six priorities for the \$91M ARPA funds (SLFRF/State & Local Fiscal Recovery Funds) as described in the Washoe County Recovery Plan found on the county website:

- 1. Address health disparities** known to directly influence social inequities in health through programs that target populations with higher incidents of disease.
 - a. Washoe County (WC) elders (aged 60+) have a higher incidents of disease than younger age groups, including some of the highest rates of suicide in the US. During the pandemic, our elders have become more disconnected and isolated from others due to their fear of exposure to covid, lack of transportation, living on low- and fixed-incomes, and being less likely to use (or know how to use) the internet, smartphones and computers to connect with others or with services they may need. Many WC elders live alone and are not connected to family or neighbors, so there is heightened risk of depression leading to poor physical and mental well-being.

The SAB should support programs that address these health disparities and combat isolation among WC elders:

- b. My idea is to create a pilot project (working title "Neighborhood Elders Together") to identify neighborhoods with large numbers of isolated elders, and to partner with RTC, Sanford Center, N4 (Neighbor Network of Northern Nevada), and Washoe County libraries to transport groups of these isolated/solo elders from the same neighborhood to the closest library to meet and socialize with each other, share refreshments, try new activities they choose (such as yoga, exercise, how to use a smartphone, tablet or computer, how to access services they want, how to access affordable transportation on their own or with each other, how to use the library's resources, etc.). The goal would be that each of them would make a friend, and they would form new social connections with each other and build a stronger community in their neighborhood to socialize and help each other when needed. These social connections would lessen depression and isolation, leading to better physical and mental health outcomes. The project would include support of activities in the neighborhood that continue to grow their social connections.**
- c. -ARPA grants to other elder-serving programs such as WC Senior Services, Center for Healthy Aging, Northern NV Food Bank, Catholic Charities, Volunteers of America, Sanford Center of Aging, The Continuum, Senior Outreach Services, Seniors in Service, HELLO Build Health Project, OLLI, local healthcare providers, and others.**

2. **Bolster economic recovery** for small businesses to mitigate financial hardships, implement structural changes, or address other COVID-related issues.
3. **Childhood environments** with key partners in the community who deliver early learning and family support services
4. **Build stronger neighborhoods** with initiatives that preserve and expand upon affordable housing options for low to mid-income level earners in our community.

SAB should support:

- a. **Brent Boynton's idea contained in 2020 Age Friendly Reno Action Plan – Create a pilot project to give landlords who would otherwise be agreeable to participating in HUD voucher programs in Washoe County an additional monthly stipend (or could be tax rebate if we could get new legislation passed) to encourage them to rent to qualified local voucher holders. Grant could go to Reno Housing Authority or to a local nonprofit such as Center for Healthy Aging.**
 - b. **Marsy Kupfersmith's idea- Create a pilot project for low- and mid-income renters to encourage local landlords to use multi-year leases with future rent increases described so both landlord and tenant know what to expect and can plan for future rent increases. (Could incentivize with tax rebate or cash incentive). Grant could go to WC Senior Services Housing Navigator (if funded) or to a local nonprofit such as Center for Healthy Aging.**
5. **Focus on foundational investments** into stormwater infrastructure and the expansion of broadband service into underserved locations.

SAB should support expansion of FREE broadband service to all elders (60+) and training elders how to use a smartphone/tablet/computer and helping elders to obtain this equipment at low or no cost.

6. **Address the root causes of homelessness**, to include collaborative solutions for mental health, substance abuse and identifying pathways to independent living.

SAB should strongly support WC decisions to invest a significant amount of its SLFRF to improve homeless services and increase access to affordable housing for low-income residents. Projects identified to date include land and structural improvements to the region's emergency homeless shelters. Additional projects, not yet obligated but under review, would provide increased staff and case management resources, and investments in the Washoe County Affordable Housing Trust Fund, to strengthen low-income affordable housing development efforts.