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Trenton Mayor Reed Gusciora enjoys a moment with young residents from the city who have benefitted from ARP funds received.

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From 222 West State

Michael F. Cerra, League Executive Director



ARP & More: Building on Opportunities

We've learned much through the beginning and end of the pandemic, and it has significantly impacted the way we work, the way we think, and the way we plan for the future. With our focus this month on economic development we are beginning to see the benefits of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) funding which has found its way into local budgets to the benefit of residents.

We're now going through even more transformational changes. As the League, the National League of Cities, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors pushback on any clawback efforts regarding ARP, it is imperative for municipalities to commit and use the federal funding. Speak to your representatives on the state and federal level to ensure that these monies do the work they were intended to do throughout the Garden State.

We see so many outstanding efforts using this once-in-a-generation funding. In this issue, we look at Trenton and Union's ARP-funded work. As Trenton Mayor Reed Gusciora notes, "While the receipt of the ARP funds is unquestionably a "good problem" to have, determining the most appropriate uses has been tough." (See page 6) We hope

you continue to work with the League on your efforts and share your success stories in the pages of future editions.

Other towns around New Jersey are maximizing their resources, whether in rural, suburban, urban, or shore communities. Those Wildwood Days are going gangbusters with the commercial corridor evolving thanks to a five-year designation from the Department of Community Affairs' Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP) (see page 34). "NPP provides funding to assist with economic and community development projects designed to help revitalize the designated area and ensure future economic success," local officials said.

Communities with brownfields are working with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to convert these spaces into clean, safe, and usable space (see page 14). This smart grown effort not only recovers underutilized spaces, but also helps preserve greenfields. "EPA estimates that 1 acre of brownfields reuse saves up to 4.6 acres of new greenfield development, with greater greenfield land savings anticipated in New Jersey."

Moving into the summer, we hope that your economic development plans advance successfully and that you share your stories with the League. 📖

Michael Cerra

“As the League, the National League of Cities, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors pushback on any clawback efforts regarding ARP, it is imperative for municipalities to commit and use the federal funding.”

PS: Save the date for the One Day Mini-Conference, June 14.
For more information, visit www.njlm.org/seminars.



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ARP Success Stories

Municipalities make improvements and build economically with federal funding

Reed Gusciora, Mayor, Trenton; and Manuel Figueiredo, Mayor, Union Township (Union)

Following are reports from Trenton and Union Township (Union) on how they are stimulating their economies with American Resue Plan funding,



Above (from top) Trenton Mayor Reed Gusciora with students in Trenton; then-Mayor, now Committee-woman Michele Delisfort of Union Twp. (Union) presents a funding check.



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Trenton

On March 11, 2021, the White House announced that President Biden had signed into law the historic American Rescue Plan (ARP)—a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus and aid package aimed at addressing the impact of COVID-19. We immediately gathered at City Hall to formulate our plan on how to apply for funds from the Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund.

Needless to say, we were thrilled when we learned that the City of Trenton had been awarded almost \$73 million in direct ARP funds, \$36.5 million was distributed to the city in May 2021 and another \$36.5 million was allotted in June 2022. Now the real challenge began: how to best use this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to combat the lingering economic effects of COVID-19?

Fittingly, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic required creativity and resourcefulness to ensure that we received appropriate feedback from all interested stakeholders, including the city council and the residents of Trenton. Utilizing remote meetings, we assembled an advisory committee of city officials, policy experts, and community leaders to help evaluate projects.

Almost immediately upon receiving the funds, we utilized our virtual community billboard (talktrenton.org) to provide residents with an outlet for ideas and reactions to proposed uses of the funds. We also held two public webinars in the form of community remote meetings to present the city's ARP plans and provide a forum for residents to pose questions.

While the receipt of the ARP funds is unquestionably a good problem to have, determining the most appropriate uses has been tough. Although the specific projects have evolved, we are consistently focused on 3 primary goals: (1) building youth and neighborhood resilience; (2) transforming aging infrastructure; and (2) investing in local jobs and businesses. With an eye towards these goals, Year 1 of Trenton's ARP plan focused on solutions that have long term implications



Then-Mayor Delisfort presents an ARP Small Business Relief Grant program check.

towards the revival of the city:

- New first responder radio equipment and 911 emergency dispatch center.
- Parks upgrade.
- Water infrastructure.
- Expansion of the city animal shelter.

We are also enhancing the success of our ARP projects by coordinating with existing programs. For example, to address youth and neighborhood resilience, we are investing in rehabilitating and improving our parks, establishing a mental health program to address COVID-19 and gun violence, and continuing with our vaccination clinics for Trenton residents, including booster shots.

However, these efforts will not occur in isolation. We will complement these programs with services offered by other state and county agencies, as well as partnering with existing city programs. Specifically, we established two subrecipient programs:

1. A not-for-profit pool that provides grants of up to \$100,000 to eligible 501(c)(3) organizations serving the Trenton community to fund uses permitted by the US Treasury's Final Rule.

2. A small business pool to provide financial assistance to small (25 or less employees or annual revenue of less than \$250,000) Trenton businesses.

As we all know, there is no magic wand or single answer to the challenges our cities face on a daily basis. However, if there is a positive takeaway from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is the enduring optimism of our residents and the opportunities that we have to use the ARP funds we have received to create positive outcomes for our communities.

Union Township

The Township of Union, with its quiet neighborhoods and bustling downtown, is proud of many things, but especially of its small business community. Businesses range from Latin, Italian, African and Asian restaurants, to yoga studios and art galleries, to bakeries and fitness centers. The economic landscape of the township is constantly evolving, but it was all put on hold in March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered businesses and owners were forced to reinvent their business models in order to survive.

"Of course we had to do whatever was needed to keep our residents safe,"

said then-Mayor and current Committeewoman Michele Delisfort. “But I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the negative impact that this had on our small business community.”

Throughout the course of the pandemic, the Township’s Economic Development Department and its Director, Carlos N. Sanchez, worked to assist businesses and keep them informed in the many COVID-19 mandates and regulations while maintaining open dialogue to ensure safety for owners, employees and residents.

When President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 into law, the Township of Union sought ways to create programs to assist businesses. The Township, which has approximately 1,300 businesses in total, decided to allocate \$1 million in ARP Funds to establish the Township’s American Rescue Plan Small Business Relief Grant Program.

The program was designed with flexible criteria and a fast track application process. Specifically, the program included criteria that targeted existing for-profit businesses with less than 30 full-time equivalent employees, located within the Township of Union. Home-based businesses and real-estate holding companies were not eligible for the grant. Grant funds had to be used to fund eligible business costs and expenses associated with COVID-19, resulting from business closure, partial closure or business interruption.

The grant application required certain certifications from the business owner. Firstly, applicants needed to be properly registered with the New Jersey Department of Treasury, Division of Taxation, and be current with all federal and state payroll, sales and income taxes.

Applicants also needed to submit: a description of the nature or type of business of the applicant; proof of whether the business was operating or open at the time of the grant application; and whether the applicant would make a “good faith effort” to remain open for at least 12 months after receiving the grant; a brief description of how their business was adversely impacted by COVID-19

resulting in a reduction of its operations, whether due to partial closure, complete closure, or a change in the manner of doing business; and a disclosure of any COVID-19 or Relief Grant programs received by the applicant for the business from the Federal, State, County, Local Government or private entities.

The Township chose to partner with a third-party vendor to facilitate the grant application process, which ensured that the undertaking was transparent and fair to every business that applied. The application focused on how businesses were impacted due to the pandemic, and how they would use the award money. 🦄



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League, Municipal Officials Head to the Hill, Meet Federal Reps at NLC Congressional City Conference

League members were in Washington this March attending the National League of Cities' (NLC) Congressional City Conference. League President Heck met with Congressmen Pascarell and Kean and representatives of Congresswomen Watson Coleman, and Sherrill, and Senators Booker and Memendez.

First Lady Dr. Jill Biden addressed the general session, as did cabinet secretaries, key program administrators, and local leaders including Newark Mayor Ras Baraka.

Topics covered by the New Jersey delegation in meetings with the state's federal representatives included repealing the deduction cap on State and Local Taxes (SALT), a long-term reauthorization of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), ensuring there is no claw back of unspent or unobligated American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF), and reauthorization of the National Farm Bill. 🇺🇸



Newark Council President Mclver and League President Mayor Heck at the Capitol building in Washington



Local and League officials with Rep. Pascarell.



The NJ delegation meets with Representative Kean in his office.



(l to r) Newark Council President LaMonica Mclver, League Dep. Dir. Lori Buckelew, Rep. Pallone, League Pres. Mayor Ray Heck.



First Lady Dr. Jill Biden speaks to the gathered attendees.

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