

# Granite City American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding Community Engagement Summary Report



January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023



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## INTRODUCTION

### **About this report**

This report summarizes community engagement efforts and public feedback received on how to use one-time American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for the City of Barre. The report includes survey results from the November 2022 Granite City Community Innovation Funds Survey, summarizes public comments from a November 2022 public forum, and details the response to a *Letter of Interest* (LOI) funding request notice that was published in September 2022. Public opinions gathered during this engagement effort will contribute to understanding how best to use ARPA funding to support innovative community projects, as well as how to leverage these funds to support on-going capital improvements toward the success of the City of Barre.

This community engagement effort was led by City Manager, Nicolas Storrellicastro in collaboration with Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission staff, and Ear to the Ground, a Vermont community planning consulting firm. For further questions about this report, please contact City Manager, Nicolas Storrellicastro at: [citymanager@barrecity.org](mailto:citymanager@barrecity.org)

### **About the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA)**

As part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 ([ARPA](#)), the City of Barre has special, one-time funding to support transformative community projects which can be leveraged by additional funding from outside organizations. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) established the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (SLFRF) which provides \$350 billion to state and local governments across the nation for the response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.



Of Vermont's \$1.25 billion share, over \$200 million (about \$300 per Vermonter) was allocated to municipalities. The City of Barre received \$2.5 million and needs to decide what to spend funds on by December 31, 2024. The funds must be spent by December 31, 2026.

### **Community-Innovation Funding, Letters of Interest Request**

In September 2022, the City of Barre published a *Letters of Interest* (LOI) request notice for any groups of people, individuals or organizations working for the public benefit in the City of Barre, Vermont to request ARPA funds. To date, the city has received 21 Letters of Interest. Requests received prior to November 15<sup>th</sup> were included in the community survey to gauge public support for each project. Financial amounts requested range from \$450 to \$316,250. At the time of this report, the evaluation of these requests is in process. Proposals include:

1. Turning Point Recovery Center Restoration
2. Central Vermont Adult Basic Education
3. Old Labor Hall Lift
4. Old Labor Hall Media/Facility Upgrades
5. Installation of ADA signage in City Hall
6. Updating the City website to be ADA accessible
7. Installation of ADA wheelchair swing in a playground
8. City Hall ADA bathroom upgrades
9. Warming Shelter at Aldrich Library
10. Athletic Field upgrades at Spaulding Highschool
11. Barre Area Senior Center Visual Media Center Upgrades
12. Civic Center Facility Upgrades
13. Studio Place Arts "Walk Through to Main St Art Project"
14. Granite City Apartments - creating 9 new apartments at the Ward 5 School
15. Barre Opera House External Lights Project
16. Circle Women's Shelter Upgrades
17. Installation of lighting on Bond Field
18. Purchase Electric Vehicles for Meals on Wheels
19. Services for Youth in Transition
20. Central Vermont TV Programming
21. Sage Mountain Afterschool Program

Two of the proposed projects have already received funding. The city has committed \$6,000 in ARPA funding for the warming shelter; and the city received a \$3.5M earmark in the federal omnibus budget to make HVAC and ADA upgrades for the City of Barre Auditorium.

### **Public Forum**

A public forum was held on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 6:30-8pm at Alumni Hall in Barre to inform the public about one-time ARPA funds and to encourage public participation in the ARPA community survey. Approximately forty people attended the public forum, in person and online. City department heads spoke regarding department capital funding needs and LOI applicants spoke to their organization's funding needs.

Forum participants were encouraged to share their priorities for the use of ARPA funds, or to speak to any of the suggested uses that had been presented by the department heads or LOI applicants. Most of those who spoke at the forum expressed strong support for the use of ARPA funding to improve the City's aging infrastructure, particularly streets, sidewalks, public buildings, and the wastewater facility. Individuals who chose to leave sticky notes on the

posterboards at the event expressed support across a broader range of projects, including expansion of trail systems and arts upgrades around the city. Use of ARPA funds on infrastructure was, however, the broad consensus at the forum.

### **Community Survey**

A community survey was published November 7<sup>th</sup> to December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022, to gather feedback from those who live, work, and spend time in the City of Barre. The goal of the survey was to gauge the public's priorities for use of ARPA funds.

While the community survey was anonymous, demographic information was collected to understand how inclusive the engagement process was. The survey was available in five languages; Bosnian, English, Russian, Spanish, and Ukrainian, based on languages spoken in the Barre Unified Union School District. The survey was available online or on paper. Both online and paper survey responses were included in the survey results. Three hundred and nine (309) people took the survey.

The ideas and topics presented in the survey reflect those identified by residents in the [All In For Barre Report and Action Plan](#), those brought forward through the [Innovation Funding Letters of Interests](#) and priorities identified in the [City of Barre's Capital Improvement Plan \(CIP\)](#). The five focus areas of the survey are: **Housing, Community Programs and Services, Streets and Sidewalks, Parks and Trails, and Public Buildings and Utilities**. Each focus area highlights relevant interests and opportunities which have been raised in these previous community engagement efforts.

The following 'Quick Look' section of this report shows a snapshot of top funding priority areas for those who responded to the survey. The 'Closer Look' section of this report shows all survey questions and results.

## COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

### QUICK LOOK

#### Focus Area Priorities, Ranked

1. Housing

2. Public Buildings and Utilities

3. Streets and Sidewalks

4. Community Programs and Services

5. Parks and Trails

When asked to rank the five focus areas for funding priority, **housing-related initiatives ranked first**. Repair and upgrades for **public buildings and utilities ranked second**, and **street and sidewalk improvements ranked third**. Improving access to community programs and services ranked fourth and improving park and trail condition and access ranked fifth.

#### Housing Priorities, Ranked

1. Repair, update, and weatherize current housing stock

2. Assist first time home owners and low-income households

3. Temporary housing and emergency sheltering options

4. Feasibility study to understand available land for development

Most survey respondents agreed **funding the repair, updating, and weatherizing of current housing stock was important or very important**. Funding assistance programs for **first time homeowners and low-income households ranked second for most important housing initiative** of those included on the survey. Temporary housing and emergency shelters ranked third.

#### Community Programs and Services Priorities, Ranked

1. Increase access and affordability of infant and preschool childcare and education

2. Increase access to school age youth and teen after school and weekend events

3. Offer programs and events for career training and workforce development

4. Programs and events to boost business, start-ups, and entrepreneurship

5. Free, public events which celebrate local food, traditions, cultures, arts and seasons

To gauge funding priorities, survey participants were asked how important different types of community programs and services were to them. **Access and affordability of infant and preschool childcare and education programs ranked first**. **Access to school-age and teen programs ranked second**. **Career and workforce development ranked third**. Programs and events to boost business, start-ups and entrepreneurship ranked fourth, and free public events celebrating local food, traditions, cultures, arts, and seasons ranked fifth.

### Street and Sidewalk Priorities, Ranked

1. Improve year-round access to sidewalks

2. Improve walking and cycling connections between schools, residential areas and Downtown

3. Street beautification, including trees, benches, trash/recycling bins

4. Improve bus stop conditions, such as bus shelters

5. Improve parking and parking signage for Downtown

### Park and Trail Priorities, Ranked

1. Improve and expand recreational trail connections in and around the city of Barre

2. Expand public playground options and ensure ADA compliant design

3. Explore options for creating public access to the riverfront and river for recreation

4. Improve year-round access to trails and parks

5. Improve signage and wayfinding for trails and parks

### Public Buildings and Utilities Priorities, Ranked

1. Maintain and improve water treatment plant

2. Understand and improve stormwater impacts and mitigation

3. Update all city buildings to be ADA compliant

4. Maintain and improve Civic Center Facilities

5. Improve energy efficiency of all City Buildings

**Repairing, improving, and maintaining sidewalks for year-round use ranked first in importance** in the streets and sidewalks focus area. Improving walking and cycling connections ranked second, and street beautification ranked third. **Comments left in the survey and noted in the public forum reflected the wish for sidewalk and street improvements to be a funding priority for the City of Barre.**

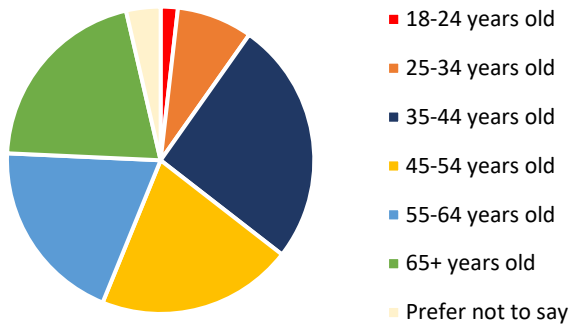
Within the focus area of parks and trails, **improving and expanding recreational trail connections ranked first in importance. Expanding playground options and ensuring Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance ranked second.** Exploring options for accessing the river and riverfront for recreation ranked third. There is interest by survey respondents for year-round access to trails, but this and wayfinding signage was less of a priority for more survey participants.

From the choices given on the survey, **maintaining, and improving the water treatment plant in Barre is a top priority for survey participants.** This is reflected in comments at the end of the survey and during the November 15<sup>th</sup> public forum. Understanding and improving stormwater impacts and mitigation ranked second in this focus area and updating city buildings to be ADA compliant ranked third.



## DEMOGRAPHICS

### How old are the survey participants?

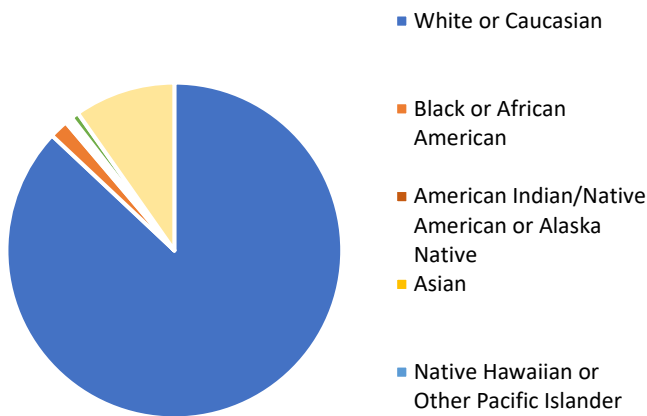


#### QUICK FACTS - AGE

Respondent count: 272

Ages 35-65 and older were evenly represented within the survey. Those 25-34 were represented less. Those ages 18-24 were the least represented in the survey.

### What race(s), ethnicity, or origin(s) do the survey participants identify with?



#### QUICK FACTS - RACE, ETHNICITY

Respondent count: 273

238 (87%) = White or Caucasian

5 (2%) identified as Black or African American.

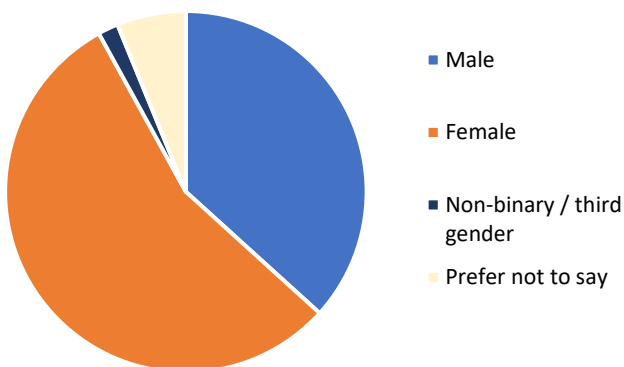
One identified as Indigenous/Native American or Alaska Native.

One person identified as Asian.

10 (3.82%) identified as Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Spanish origin.

6 participants identified as another race, ethnicity, or origin which was not listed on the survey.

### What gender do survey respondents identify with?



#### QUICK FACTS - GENDER IDENTITY

Respondent count: 271

152 (56%) = female.

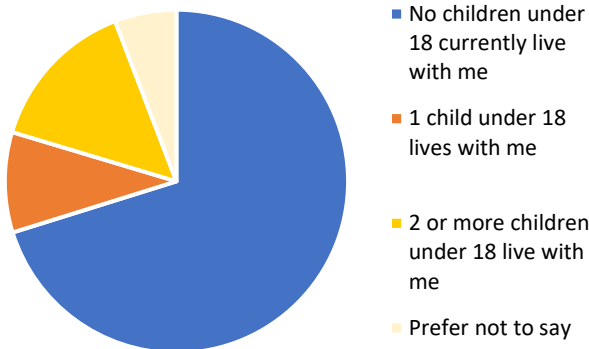
98 (36%) identified as male.

5 (2%) identified as non-binary or third gender.

16 (6%) = preferred not to say.

## DEMOGRAPHICS continued

### Do survey participants currently live with children 18 or younger?

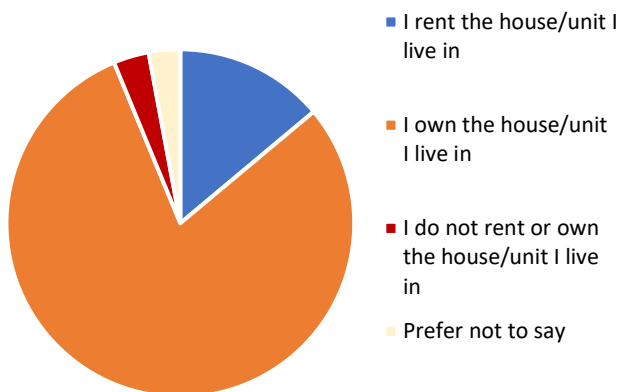


#### QUICK FACTS - CHILDREN AT HOME

Respondent count: 271

One hundred and ninety-one (70%) of survey participants have no children under 18 currently living at home. At least sixty-five (25%) respondents had at least one child under 18 living in their home.

### Do survey participants rent or own the house/unit they live in?



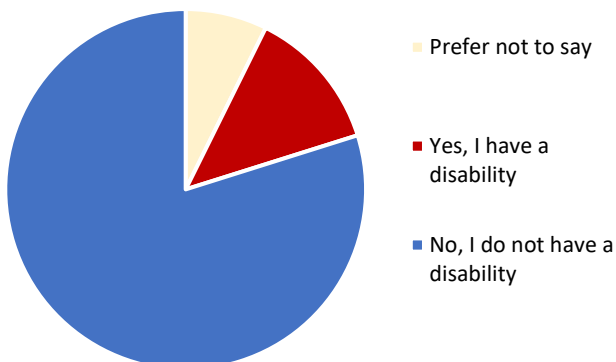
#### QUICK FACTS – RENT or OWN

Respondent count: 271

Most survey participants (80%) said they own their house/unit. Thirty-eight (14%) rent the house/unit they currently live in.

According to Vermont Housing Data, over half of City of Barre residents rent their place of residence, indicating this survey does not accurately represent this demographic.

### How many survey respondents identify as a person with a disability?



#### QUICK FACTS –DISABILITY

Respondent count: 218

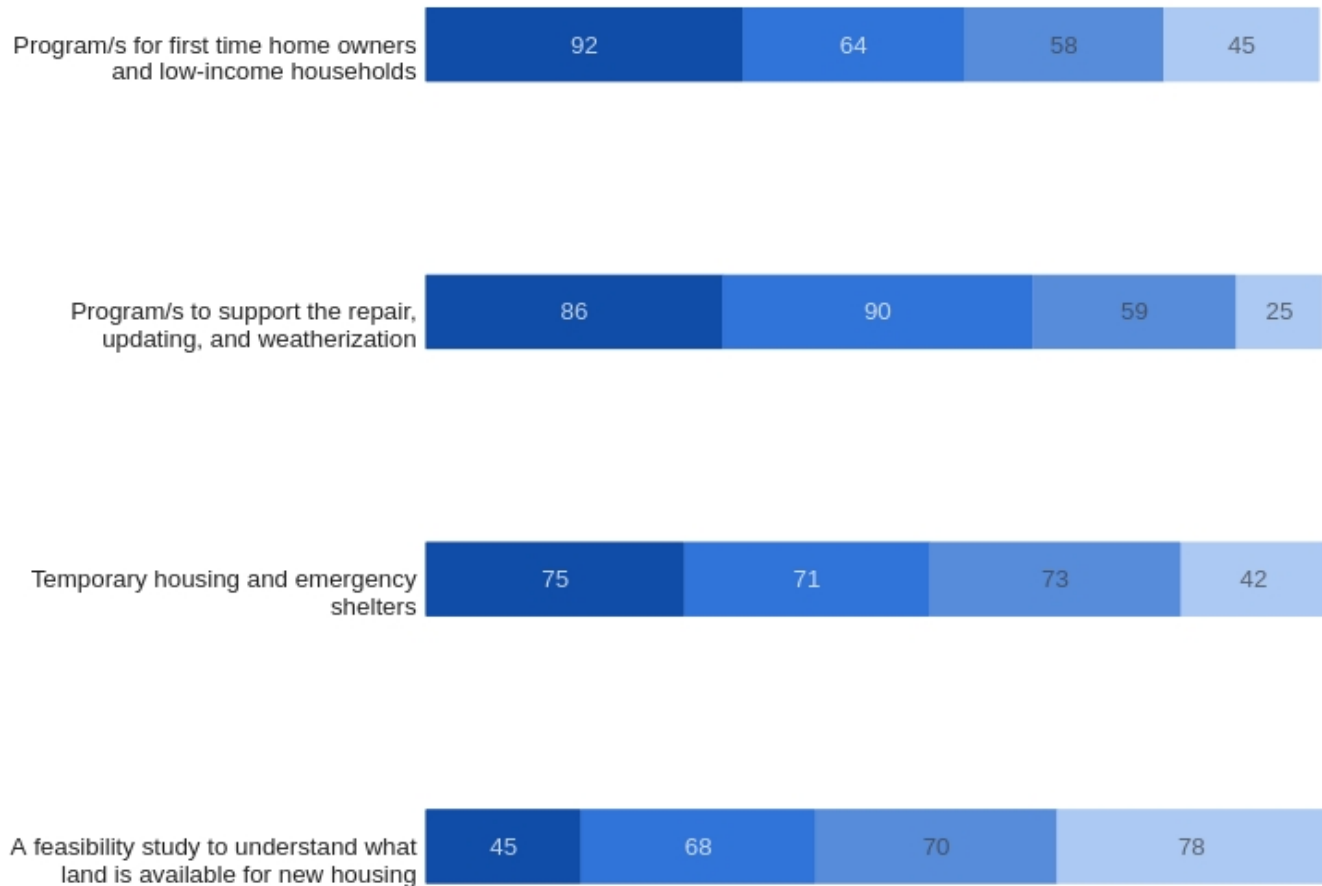
Of the 218 respondents who answered this question, 35 (13%) identified as a person with a disability. The survey did not specify type of disability.

## CLOSER LOOK- HOUSING PRIORITIES

**Survey question:** How important do you think the following types of initiatives are as they relate to housing needs in the City of Barre?

Numbers show number of survey respondents.

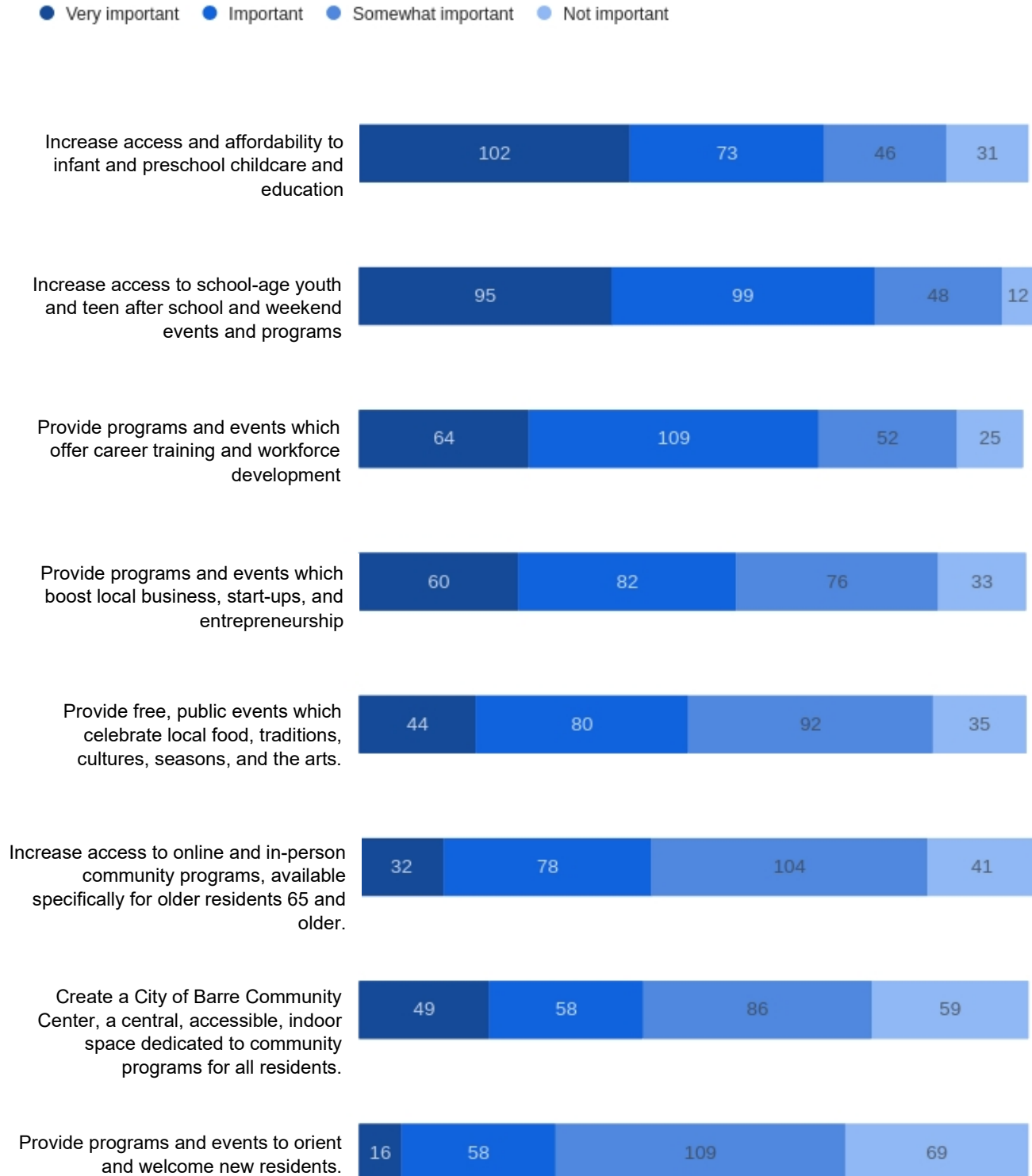
● Very important  
 ● Important  
 ● Somewhat important  
 ● Not important



## CLOSER LOOK - COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

**Survey question:** How important do you think the following initiatives are as they relate to community programs and services are for City of Barre residents?

Numbers show number of survey respondents.

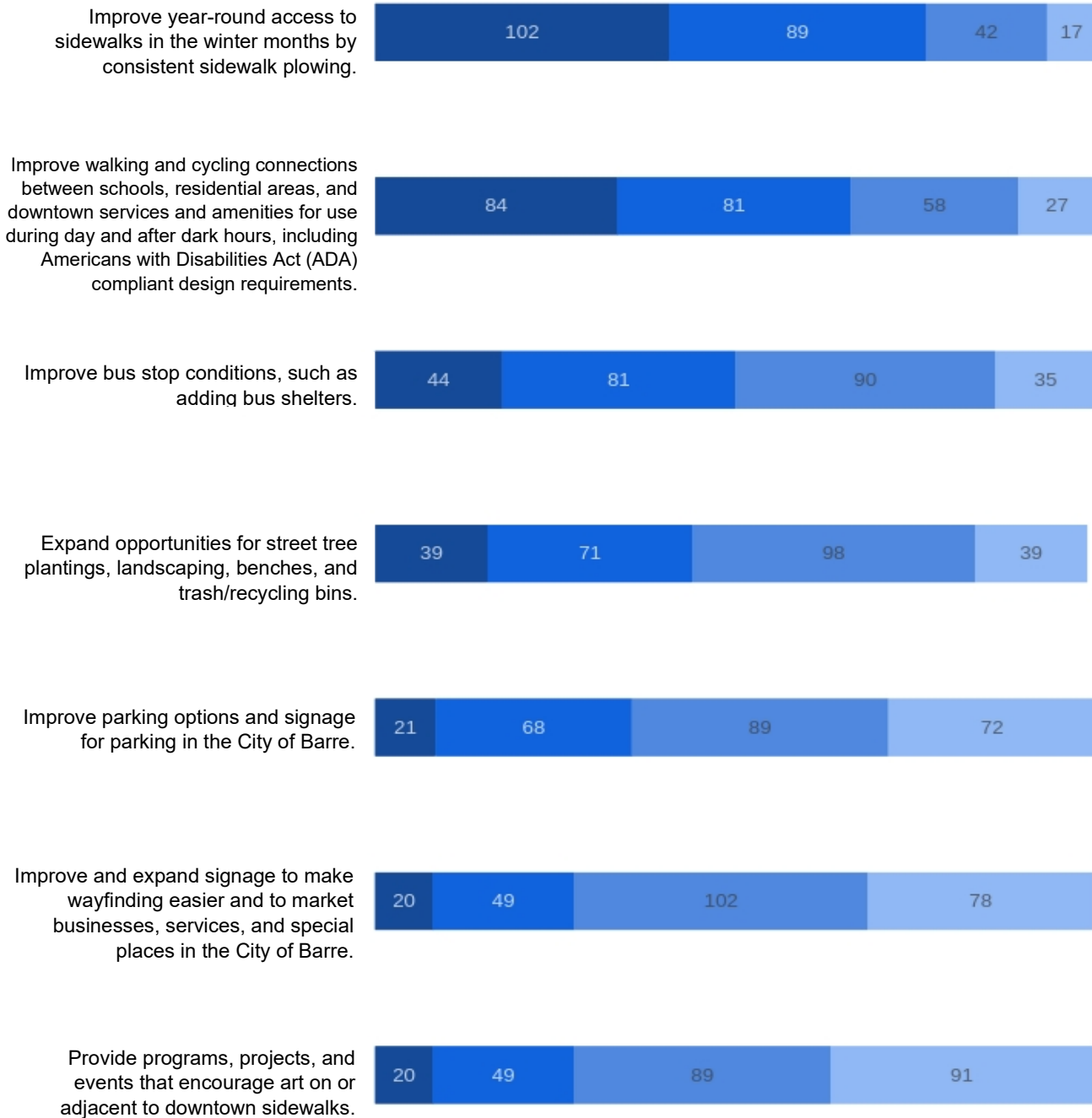


## CLOSER LOOK- STREETS AND SIDEWALKS

**Survey question:** How important do you think the following initiatives are as they relate to streets and sidewalks for the City of Barre?

Numbers show number of survey respondents.

● Very important ● Important ● Somewhat important ● Not important

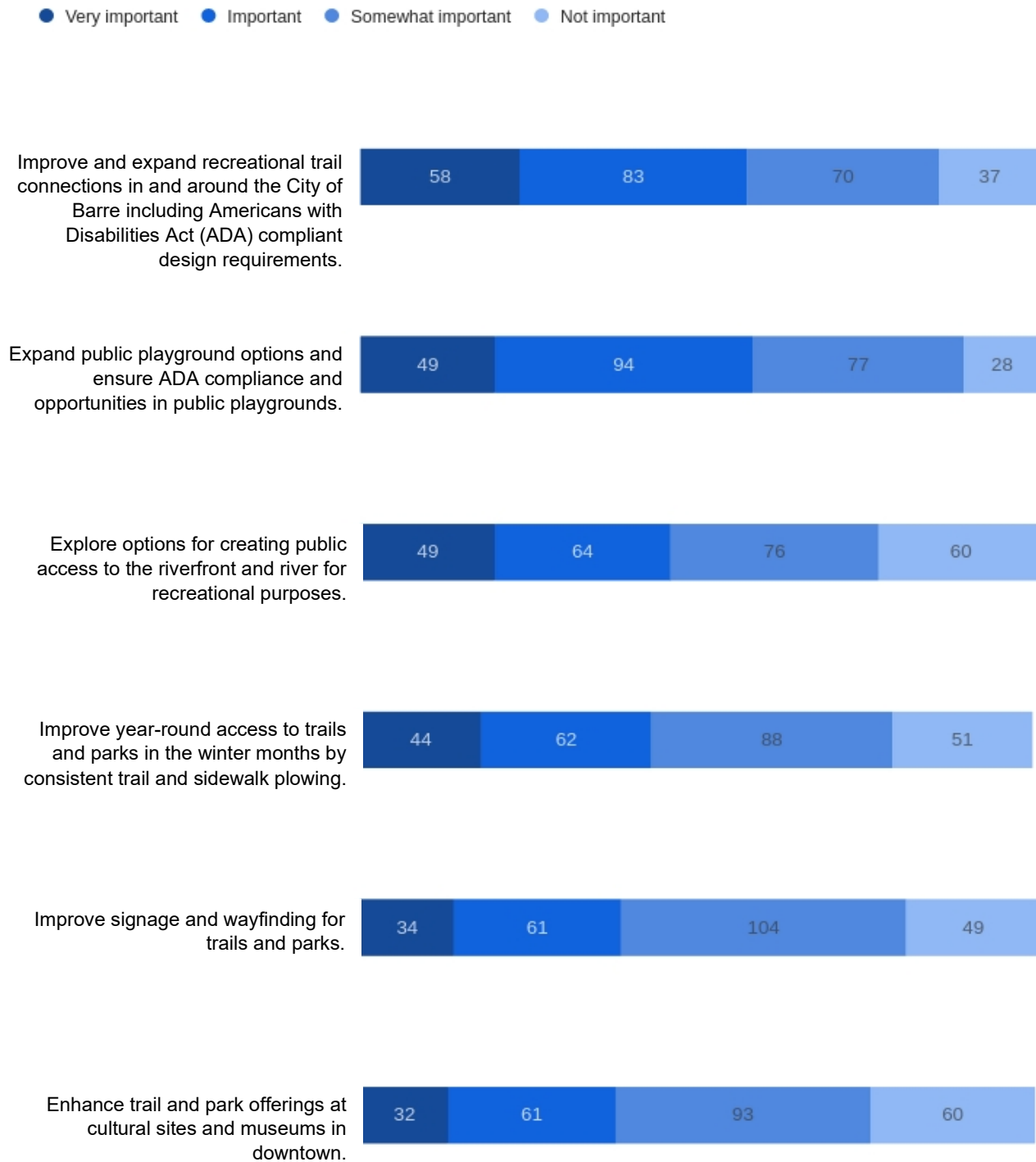




## CLOSER LOOK- PARKS and TRAILS

**Survey question:** How important do you think the following initiatives are as they relate to parks and trails for the City of Barre?

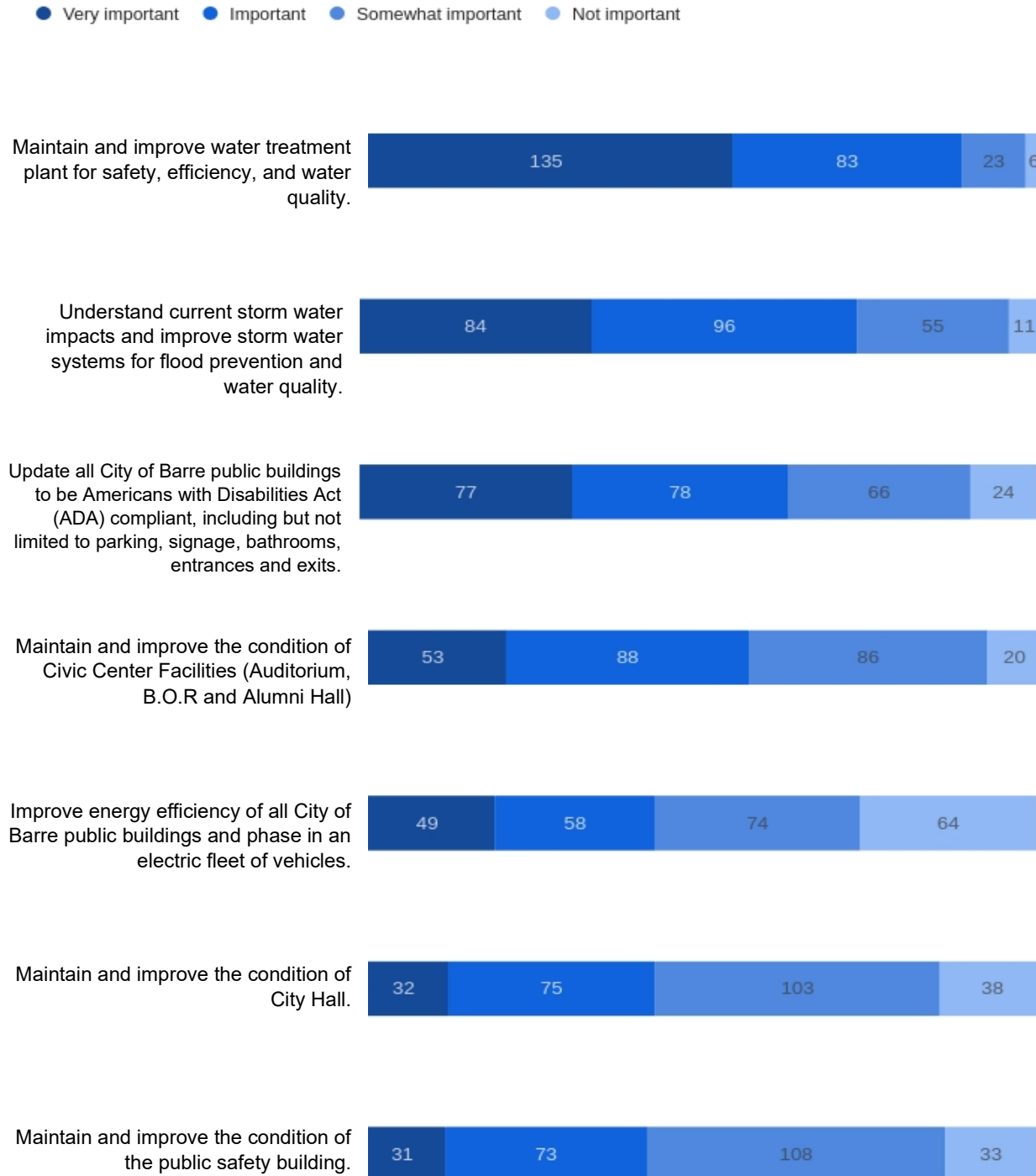
Numbers show number of survey respondents.



## CLOSER LOOK- PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND UTILITIES

**Survey question:** How important do you think the following initiatives are as they relate to public buildings and utilities for the City of Barre?

Numbers show number of survey respondents.



## CLOSER LOOK – OVERALL PRIORITIES

**Survey question:** Given the priority areas discussed in this survey, where would you like to direct ARPA funding over the next three years? Rank at least your top three priority areas.

Numbers show number of survey respondents.

- Ranked as top priority   ● Ranked as 2nd priority   ● Ranked as 3rd priority   ● Ranked as 4th priority
- Ranked as lowest priority

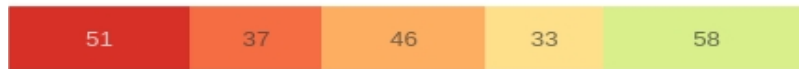
Improve housing conditions, housing availability, and housing affordability.



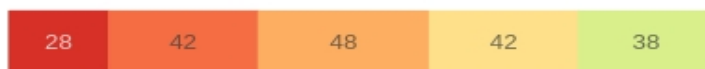
Improve and expand street and sidewalk safety, conditions, and connections.



Maintain and improve condition of city buildings and utilities.



Improve access to community programs and services



Improve condition of and access to recreational trails, parks, and playgrounds.

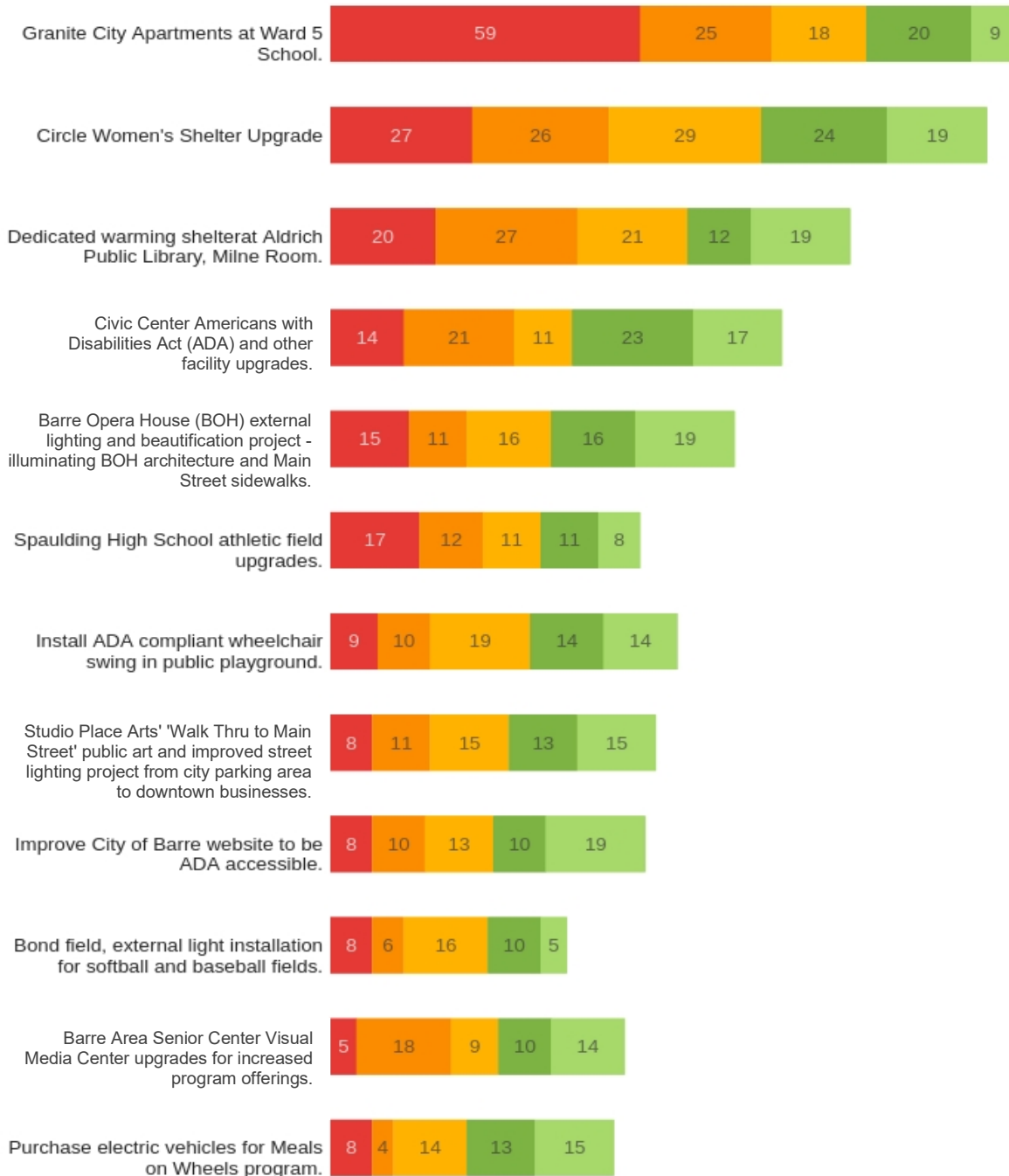


## LETTERS OF INTEREST FUNDING REQUESTS

In September 2022, the City of Barre posted a LOI request for ARPA funding considerations. Groups of people, individuals, or organizations working for the public benefit in the City of Barre were eligible to apply. The list below are recent project proposals brought forward in the Letters of Interest request process. These projects range in size and scale and may require additional funding sources to be completed. Survey participants were asked to rank at least their top five projects. These rankings alone will not determine which projects will be funded.

Numbers show number of survey respondents.

● Top priority ● 2nd priority ● 3rd priority ● 4 ● 5







- Encourage creative use of empty stores and storefronts

#### **Invest in green space and natural resources**

- Prioritize clean, safe water
- Base ARPA funding criteria on climate change mitigation and environmental benefit
- Preserve groundwater, natural places, and natural resources for climate change mitigation
- Upkeep of Hope Cemetery
- Connect to the Cross VT Trail
- Invest in expansion of green spaces for recreation and conservation, including City Cow Pasture, Stevens Branch Gorge, Spaulding Falls
- Plan for the Barre-Montpelier bike path
- Create 'green certification' incentive program for property owners

#### **Invest in community amenities and services**

- Support local non-profit organizations that already provide community services
- Prioritize supporting LGBTQ and other marginalized communities
- Prioritize drug addiction and mental health services
- Publish an annual community resource guide
- Repair/maintain pool facility
- Incentivize volunteering initiatives from existing community organizations
- Coordinate social support and services, so as not to repeat or compete, but collaborate and expand offerings and opportunities

### **NEXT STEPS**

The results of these engagement efforts will be presented to the City Council on January 10, 2023, to inform discussions about the potential uses of ARPA funding in the context of the FY24 City budget and development of the City's capital improvement plan. As noted, ARPA funding does not have to be committed until December 31, 2024, and it does not have to be spent until December 31, 2026.