

## **American Rescue Plan Spending Proposal**

### **Mayor Levar M. Stoney – Remarks**

**September 13, 2021**

Good afternoon.

Madame President, Madame Vice President. Members of Council and residents of the great City of Richmond, thank you for inviting me here today.

I'm here to present the draft spending plan for the \$155 million in federal funding the city has received under President Biden's American Rescue Plan, also known as ARP.

It's not every day that we get the opportunity to benefit from this kind of direct support from our federal government. In fact, it may be unprecedented.

But it's also not every day that we, as elected leaders and as residents, are faced with the challenges that a once-in-a-century global pandemic has created, or, in many cases, made worse.

Over the last year and a half, our residents lost jobs and places to live.

Families lost healthcare and children lost the chance to go to school with their friends.

We lost peace of mind that we could safely interact with our own family members and friends, and our sense of community in the neighborhoods in which we live.

And, of course, we lost lives. More than 290 as of today, just in our city.

We owe it to our loved ones to continue to be strong. We must continue to be resilient.

And I know city council shares my commitment to emerge from this crisis and seize the opportunity we have to make life better in our city.

And that is why I'm so grateful to come before you today with a blueprint for doing exactly that --building back – not simply what was lost --but building back *better* and *stronger* through strategic, intentional and equitable investments that deliver on the promise of a quality of life our residents want, need, and deserve.

That means investing in our future by supporting our children and families.

It means building our capacity to provide affordable housing and healthy homes.

It means a healthier city that goes beyond our work to defeat Covid-19 and also addresses health inequities and climate change.

And it means building back safer – both by supporting our communities and investments in human services, and our first responders.

These are the investments our residents want us to make, and we know this because we asked them. And I'd like to thank the nearly 2,000 residents who answered our survey and participated in our engagement process, which will continue.

I would be remiss if I did not thank our new Office of Public Information and Engagement for their leadership in engaging our community.

We have also heard and listened to you, members of Council, who have unique insight into the needs of your districts.

So let me take a moment to also thank you personally, for your time and valued input, and for the collaboration that went into this draft spending plan, which aligns with the Richmond 300 Master Plan and the principles within the Equity Agenda, and ensures this funding will be put to its highest and best use.

I would also like to thank the Acting Chief Administrative Officer, Lincoln Saunders, my Acting Chief of Staff, Maggie Anderson, and our Budget Director, Jason May, and all of our DCAOS and their teams for their many hours of hard work to make and evaluate proposals.

You have the details in front of you, but let me take a few minutes to walk you through the highlights of our plan:

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As I've often said, housing is foundational to the stability of our families, and by extension, our city. It is a vaccine against poverty.

As one of our survey respondents stated:

"Increased housing costs have displaced many of my neighbors, and I cannot find a new apartment for my family."

Affordable housing is needed now more than ever.

Over the first few years of my administration, working together with Council, we were able to triple our investment in the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, only to see our ability to further expand it curtailed by last year's pandemic budget.

But the need has never been greater.

That's why our ARP spending plan sets aside **\$32 million** to build back affordable and healthy homes.

We are going to put **\$20 million** of that amount into our Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

This means **\$10 million** in this Fiscal Year and another **\$10 million** in Fiscal Year 2023. Because of this investment, we are meeting the Affordable Housing Trust Fund goal established in the Equity Agenda, and supported by city council, of **\$10 million** per year *four* years ahead of schedule.

Additionally, my administration is working to bring you a policy that would commit us to maintain this investment of \$10 million annually *AFTER* we utilize our ARP dollars these next two years. With good planning, we can be prepared to fund this shared priority in our general fund every year from here on.

This additional funding represents over a **1,268 percent** increase in dollars for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund since I took office.

Our ARP dollars offer a once in a lifetime opportunity to address our housing needs and we will certainly not miss a beat.

We are also allocating **\$6.8** million toward the Creighton Court Redevelopment project. Creighton, which was built in 1953, and the families that have called this community home for years, deserve a quality and safe place to call home.

As such, these dollars will go toward the first phase of Creighton's transformation into a mixed-income, flourishing community of choice. This investment will greatly benefit the East End community, and continue the new construction of quality, affordable housing for over 500 families.

Additionally, in Partnership with RRHA and the Better Housing Coalition, we are also going to invest **\$5.5 million** into the Highland Grove Redevelopment Project in North Richmond. These dollars will allow for the first phase of this redevelopment – which will eventually allow for the creation of 122 new for-sale homes.

This project – on the site of the former Dove Court - has been long championed by Vice-President Ellen Robertson, and long promised to the community. It's time we made good on that promise.

I also want to assure members of council and the public that we are continuing to work with the Commonwealth of Virginia on rental assistance for our residents. So, whereas we did not include additional dollars within this proposal, we know that our partnership with the

state has paid off. Specifically, we recently received a report that **\$22 million** dollars was spent on Richmonders for rental relief. We will continue this partnership with the state going forward to ensure residents get the assistance they need.

Ladies and gentlemen, these investments in housing of all types – from renters to homeowners – is how we build back more affordable and healthy homes, and how we ensure residents can stay in their homes.

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I've also often said over the last year and a half of this pandemic that it's hard to have a livelihood if you don't have a life, and the deadly impact of Covid on our community demands that we continue to devote resources to combatting this pandemic and to addressing numerous health disparities.

So we're going to focus on community and build back healthier.

As one resident said: "More than anything else, this has been a mental health strain, especially dealing with misinformation, but also missing out on being with other people."

So, included in this plan is approximately **\$5 million** to create a Health Equity Trust Fund. This fund will be managed by the Richmond City Health District through an MOU with the city and disperse funds to address various health inequities. Priority areas within this fund include:

- Covid-19 response, such as vaccination outreach, supports for decrease spread of the virus, illness, and hospitalizations;
- Covid vaccination incentives for eligible children;
- Food access and security;
- Substance abuse disorder and treatment;
- Mental and behavioral health;
- Underlying health conditions;
- Infant and maternal health; and,

- Support for resident access to care and health education.

This fund builds on the **4 million dollar** grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services that the city received earlier this year, in partnership with the Richmond City Health, district to improve health literacy and address health disparities among our Black and Latino communities.

I would be remiss if I did not thank Council President Newbille and the Health District who helped to contribute to the concept of this fund.

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I mentioned earlier that we engaged our residents to learn what was most important to them when it came to utilizing the ARP funds.

Our residents' highest priority was our children and our families, so it should come as no surprise that our largest proposed investment will be focused on their future.

Firstly, in order for our community to thrive, our parents need to be able to return to work knowing that their children are cared for and safe. That is why we are investing **\$2 million** into childcare and parental support, which was ranked very high by residents on the ARP survey.

This funding will be managed by our Office of Children and Families under the Human Services portfolio.

Additionally, as one of our fellow Richmonders told us in the survey:

“The city’s parks have been life-saving for many during the pandemic.”

That is why, I am excited to announce that we plan to invest **\$78 million** into our parks and community centers across the city.

Throughout the city, we are going to upgrade and expand our parks and public places.

And we are going to transform our community centers into *opportunity* centers – facilities that provide more than space for a youth and adult

recreation, but also offer a wide array of services that are easily accessible to residents of all ages and in multiple languages.

Models we've studied in other parts of the country use these spaces almost as mini City Halls – neighborhood hubs that can provide residents with assistance and access to financial and housing assistance and benefits, senior services, food access, healthcare, wellness education, youth programming and workforce development and training.

Our goal is to meet our residents where they are – literally right within their communities.

Briefly, here is a snapshot of how some of these investments break down:

- **\$20 million** for TB Smith Community Center in the 8<sup>th</sup> District – located off Ruffin Road near Davee Gardens;
- **\$20 million** to transform Lucks Field into a community center in the 7<sup>th</sup> District – located central to Richmond's Church Hill Neighborhoods and walkable from Whitcomb, Mosby, Fairfield, Creighton, Union Hill, Peter Paul, Eastview, Woodville and Brauer's.
- **\$16 million** to finalize the Southside Community Center in the 9<sup>th</sup> District; **AND,**
- **Partnering with the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority, we will regain management of and allocate \$8 million to renovate the Calhoun Center. This includes renovating and reopening the swimming pool for the residents of Gilpin Court Community.**

We have identified these community centers and locations as they all reside with qualifying census tracts, which include neighborhoods that have experienced historic disinvestment and have the highest poverty rates in the city. Not to mention, we know there are gaps in services and access to community centers within these neighborhoods.

***In total, these centers will be within a 10-minute walk for approximately 100,000 Richmond residents in the city's 9th, 8th, 7th, 6th, 4th, 3rd, and 2nd Council Districts.***

- We are also going to allocate **\$12 million** to implement the James River Master Plan through a series of connectivity projects, including:
  - James River Branch Trail, which connects Southside offroad to the James River Park System;
  - Crooked Branch Ravine Bridge, which connects Wythe to the Fall Line Trail and Forest Hill Park; and,
  - Texas Beach and North Bank Tower, which connects the Maymont neighborhood to the James River Park System.
  
- Also, as the Richmond 300 Master Plan recommends, we are allocating **\$500,000** for the creation of a Parks master plan, which will guide operations, expansion, maintenance, capital projects and strategic direction for the next 10-20 years.
  
- And lastly, we are allocating **\$1.5 million** for green space acquisition to close the 10-minute walk to a park gap that exists in some of our communities.

This is the largest investment in our Parks and Recreation Department in Richmond's history. We know our Parks staff and our parks themselves positively impact the lives of Richmonders. This investment



will allow us to transform how we offer city services to residents and help us create a more connected, accessible, and green city.

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Every day we are reminded that this pandemic is not over. And in fact, the American Rescue plan is a direct response to that fact.

The continuity of government operations and its ability to respond to the needs of our residents is critical to building back our city stronger, so our plan places **\$1.4 million** in a Covid Administrative Response Reserve Fund.

We are also dedicating **\$1 million** to support the critical work of our Office of Community wealth Building's workforce development program and **\$500,000** to support and expand our Community Ambassadors program, which has been critical in providing service connection and information during the pandemic.

Economic supports are also critical to helping our city recover.

As one survey respondent stated: "The pandemic opened my eyes to how our small businesses and local producers need our support more than ever."

We know the state has a 250 million dollar fund to support small businesses and non-profits. We want to ensure that Richmond businesses and non-profits can draw down as much of that funding as possible.

That is why we will invest **\$1 million** in technical and marketing support for our small businesses and non-profits to help expand their capacity and expertise to apply for state and federal grants.

Finally, we know based on feedback from residents and our councilmembers that the streets of our city's commercial corridors could use a little sprucing up.

So we're allocating **\$2 million** to façade and city beautification improvements, such as signage, trees, and other aesthetic enhancements, to make our city more supportive of our businesses districts and more welcoming to customers, residents and visitors alike.

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When we are looking to our future, we can't ignore the critical need to recognize the impact of climate change and take steps to mitigate its negative impact on our neighborhoods and the health and welfare of our residents.

We must build back to be a greener, more resilient city.

The draft plan before you allocates **\$1.5 million** to perform a much needed climate risk assessment, create an updated Urban Forestry Master Plan, and other climate mitigation needs, such as green infrastructure improvements. This investment will allow us to predict, understand and adapt to our climate risks across the entire city, as well as address known risks, such as heat islands.

We are also going to invest in resident's homes – to ensure they are safe, healthy, and environmentally sound. Specifically, we are allocating **\$4.2 million** for weatherization and home rehabilitation projects.

By fixing leaking roofs, heating and cooling systems, insulation, damaged windows and doors, we ensure that our residents not only save money on utility bills, but improve their quality of life, reduce their carbon footprints, and are able to stay in their homes, thus mitigating displacement.

We are also allocating **\$4 million** to assist homeowners in replacement of the service lead pipes that connect to their homes. This investment will ensure that residents *continue* to have clean and safe water.

And finally, we are putting in an extra **\$13.5 million** above and beyond the funding we have already set aside, to address stormwater and drainage issues in communities prone to flooding.

As many of you know, this is a major infrastructure issue we face, made worse by climate change. We must take this opportunity to invest more, and this funding provides the opportunity to make improvements sooner than later.

That's **\$23.3 million** in total to plan for and address climate and environmental challenges in the city.

And, to be clear, as with all areas of ARP funding, we will utilize an equity lens when looking at *where* this funding will be allocated, as we know some neighborhoods have a higher need than others.

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Finally, these times call for use to build back safer. The pandemic-era spike in gun violence being witnessed in cities and counties throughout our region and across our nation is the product of many factors, but we all have an obligation to do whatever we can to keep our neighborhoods safe and save lives.

So this plan makes an additional **\$8.5 million** investment in public safety.

We are going to devote an additional **\$1.5 million** to gun violence prevention on top of the funding we have already set aside in our general fund and the DCJS grant of \$500,000.

We are going to spend **\$2 million** to improve lighting and install cameras on our residential streets and business areas.

We all know the sacrifices our first responders have made during this challenging time, and the survey reflected those sentiments.

“Working in public safety has had an effect on how I interact with my family,” said one respondent. “I’ve had to take time away from my family when my co-workers have contracted the virus.’

So we are going to allocate **\$5 million** for **\$3,000 bonuses** for our first responders – which will include: police, fire, 911 operators, and the Richmond Ambulance Authority.

All of these public servants have been on the front lines of this pandemic from the beginning and have sacrificed a lot to continue to serve our city during these difficult times.

We are also working to bring forth to council an appropriation paper to provide the same \$3,000 bonuses to the entire City of Richmond workforce using available General Fund dollars. We know that our sanitation workers, finance staff, social service employees and others have sacrificed to ensure that city residents receive the services they need and deserve. That is why we know they should be recognized and rewarded as well for their dedication and service to this great city.

We thank you all for your service and hard work.

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Ladies and gentlemen of Council, residents of Richmond, that concludes my presentation on the draft ARP plan – a transformational plan you helped create.

Nobody should be under any illusion that this plan, or even this money -- **\$155 million** – can or will solve the multiple challenges we face in overcoming the effects of this pandemic.

Or in putting to bed the longstanding issues that have roots in generations of systemic racism.

That work continues. It is what I have devoted my remaining time in office to addressing, guided by our Equity Agenda.

But a once-in-a century pandemic has provided us with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, through the American Rescue Plan, to make historic investments and build back better, stronger, healthier, greener, more resilient, and safer.

And in doing so, secure the future of our children and families.

In the weeks ahead, we look forward to engaging with our residents and collaborating with city council to finalize this spending plan.

Tomorrow, we will launch the second phase of our engagement on the proposed plan, which will include both digital and in-person opportunities to provide feedback.

I know that council will also take time to review and provide feedback on this plan.

With all of this in mind, it is my goal that we approve this plan before the end of October. We do not have time to waste – we must get to work and continue to improve the lives of our residents.

Thank you for your time and your talent. I look forward to continuing this conversation with you over the next several weeks.