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Pittsfield Township leaders have \$4M in federal COVID stimulus. Here's how they'll spend it

Lucas Smolcic Larson – Oct 14, 2021



WASHTENAW COUNTY, MI - Sewer line improvements and upgrades to township buildings are the major winners in how Pittsfield Township leaders are choosing to spent roughly \$4 million in federal COVID-19 stimulus funds, according to a budget approved Wednesday, Oct. 13.

The American Rescue Plan Act is giving the township \$4,073,805 to work with, a sum equivalent to about a fourth of what the township projected to bring in to its general fund this fiscal year, according to budget documents.

The federal dollars are restricted to use for government services troubled by lost revenue during the pandemic, aid to households and groups affected by the public health emergency, pay to essential public workers and investments in infrastructure.

The largest of Pittsfield's commitments with the federal dollars is \$2.5 million to upgrade a major artery of the township's sewer system, carrying 60% of the municipality's wastewater, according to officials.

That project, centered on a section of Michigan Avenue, is slated to begin construction next year.

There, concrete pipes are deteriorating under U.S. 12, according to a draft project plan posted online, which projected total costs at \$31 million.

Another chunk of the federal dollars will go toward upgrading air quality in municipal buildings, especially the public safety building — a residential building retrofitted to accommodate police and fire headquarters, according to Township Supervisor Mandy Grewal.

About \$500,000 of the remaining federal coronavirus money is also budgeted for some improvements to non-motorized pathways in the township, Grewal said, with the remaining \$70,000 headed to parks infrastructure.

“Non-motorized and park amenities have been rated at the top by our residents, so we felt that was obviously the best use for any monies that was left over,” Grewal said, noting the failure of a public safety tax increase earlier this year squeezed general fund dollars that had been intended for these purposes.

Municipalities across the county are eligible for the federal COVID stimulus money based on their population and most recent budget. Washtenaw County government received roughly \$71 million, dishing out the first chunk of money last month for broadband infrastructure, childcare and other programs after a process of public engagement.

Grewal said she asked the township’s board if they wanted to host a public forum before approving the spending at a working session last month. But, she said, the board felt it wasn’t needed because of the amount of funds available and the “predetermination in terms of where we were going to use it because of the high need” in those areas.

At the Pittsfield Township Board of Trustees meeting Wednesday, the board unanimously approved the budget with little discussion. One trustee, Linda Edwards-Brown, asked if the funds could be spent on anti-racism and equity trainings for the township.

Grewal responded that those programs didn’t fall under the allowable spending categories, but that the township would budget for those trainings in the coming year.

The American Rescue Plan dollars are slated for distribution this year and next, according to the budget.