



July 19, 2021

Via email to Blake.Webber@mahouse.gov and Jeremy.Spittle@masenate.gov

Chairman Aaron Michlewitz, Joint Committee on Ways & Means
Chairman Michael Rodrigues, Joint Committee on Ways & Means
Chairman Daniel Hunt, House Committee on Federal Stimulus & Census Oversight
Chairwoman Cindy Friedman, Joint Committee on Health Care Financing & Senate Committee on Ways & Means

Re: Testimony in Support of ARPA Funding for Climate Resilience

Dear Chairs,

As you know, Massachusetts has received \$5.3 billion in state and local recovery funds under the federal American Rescue Plan Act (“ARPA”). Charles River Watershed Association (“CRWA”) urges the legislature to use this opportunity to invest in climate resilience, clean water and sewer infrastructure, and outdoor spaces as it allocates these funds. Although there are many other important funding priorities, investments in these areas will have a multifaceted impact: nature-based solutions and green infrastructure clean our air and water; help to mitigate flooding and heat impacts; provide important benefits for public health, especially for the communities most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; and will provide good jobs to contribute to Massachusetts’ economic recovery. Governor Baker’s proposed plan included the funding listed below; we urge the legislature to meet or exceed these funding levels.

ARPA Funding Priorities:

- **Climate Resilience and Preparedness:** The Baker Administration has proposed directing \$300 million to the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (“MVP”) grant program. The MVP program provides critical funding for high-priority climate resilience projects, but currently receives many more project applications than it is able to fund. A recent MVP grant allowed CRWA to work with 15 watershed communities to build a flooding model that predicts climate change-related flooding and highlights nature-based solutions to reduce risks. CRWA and other watershed associations already play an important facilitation role on MVP projects and would be even more effective if they were eligible to apply for MVP funding, a key component of the Baker proposal.
- **Water Infrastructure and Green Jobs:** The Baker administration has proposed \$400 million for water and sewer infrastructure. Sound water infrastructure is critical for ensuring that the public has access to clean drinking water and reliable wastewater services, and that water pollution is minimized to the greatest extent possible. According to a 2017 report by the state auditor, Massachusetts communities have combined water system spending needs in excess of \$17 billion. By investing in clean water infrastructure and prioritizing green infrastructure approaches, we can create jobs

locally that will not only support a post-pandemic economic recovery but will also build our communities' resilience to climate change. Wastewater and stormwater jobs provide good salaries and benefits, and with many current workers retiring soon, there is an opportunity to diversify the workforce in this sector.

- **Public Parks:** The Baker administration has proposed \$100 million for state park facilities. Throughout the pandemic, the importance of our outdoor public spaces as safe places for recreation, respite from the heat, and solace from social stressors has become more apparent than ever. Parks, both large and small, contribute to public health and climate resilience, providing benefits like cleaner air and water, cooler local temperatures, and reduced localized flooding. Investing in these public spaces supports many other pandemic recovery priorities, particularly for communities that have been hardest hit by COVID-19 and historical environmental injustices.

Equity should be a key consideration as the legislature allocates ARPA funding, focusing on communities that have been harmed most by the COVID-19 pandemic and will suffer most from the climate crisis. Historical underinvestment has exacerbated risks in environmental justice communities, including those posed by increasing extreme heat and flooding. Investments in climate resilience and green infrastructure are needed now to prevent current disparities from worsening and to protect the health of these communities.

Examples of projects in the Charles River watershed that ARPA funding for green infrastructure and climate resilience would support:

- **Regional Watershed Flood Model:** An initiative of the Charles River Climate Compact and currently comprising 15 watershed communities working in partnership with CRWA, the Charles River Flood Model helps communities plan for stormwater and riverine flooding impacts of climate change. The model supports the use of nature-based solutions to effectively manage stormwater and increase climate resilience. Funding would support additional modeling, as well as implementation of the priority projects identified.
- **Stream Restoration:** Proposed stream restoration projects, including Pegan Brook in Natick and Cheesecake Brook in Newton, would revitalize streams that are currently restricted in their capacity to handle increased rainfall due to climate change. With adequate funding, these projects would prevent flooding in nearby residential areas, improve water quality, and provide habitat for wildlife.
- **Regional Tree Planting:** As the threat posed by extreme heat grows, one of the most effective solutions is to plant more trees and reduce urban heat islands. Trees are critical infrastructure that help us adapt to our changing climate in myriad other ways, from reducing air and noise pollution to filtering stormwater and improving water quality to mitigating flooding and erosion. Communities like Boston are developing urban forestry plans to increase local tree canopy and build climate resilience and funding will be needed to implement the plans.

- Muddy River Restoration: For the second consecutive year, the Muddy River in Boston and Brookline has received a D- rating in the 2020 EPA Charles River Watershed Report Card, the lowest ranking in the entire watershed. Restoration of the Muddy River has been ongoing, but more funds are needed to fully implement the entire project as originally envisioned, including the removal of remaining invasive species, improving water quality, and ongoing maintenance.
- Drainage Improvements: Several drainage improvement projects, including projects in Weston and Newton, are fully designed and ready for construction pending funding. These projects would replace antiquated and undersized systems to prevent flooding on private property and roads and construct new drainage systems where none currently exist.

CRWA urges the legislature to consider the benefits of these and similar projects, and to prioritize funding to address the growing environmental, public health, and economic effects of climate change in Massachusetts. Thank you and please feel free to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,



Heather Miller, Esq.
General Counsel & Policy Director

cc: Charles River Watershed Legislators:

Senator Michael Barrett	Representative Shawn Dooley
Senator Joseph Boncore	Representative Carolyn Dykema
Senator William Brownsberger	Representative Nika C. Elugardo
Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz	Representative Sean Garballey
Senator Nick Collins	Representative Denise C. Garlick
Senator Cynthia Stone Creem	Representative Carmine Gentile
Senator Sal DiDomenico	Representative Russell E. Holmes
Senator Ryan Fattman	Representative Kevin G. Honan
Senator Paul Feeney	Representative Kay Khan
Senator Patricia Jehlen	Representative John J. Lawn, Jr.
Senator Rebecca Rausch	Representative David Paul Linsky
Senator Michael Rush	Representative Jay D. Livingstone
Senator Karen Spilka	Representative Elizabeth A. Malia
Representative Ruth B. Balser	Representative Paul McMurtry
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Representative Tommy Vitolo