



DIANA DICKINSON

pio@rogerscounty.org

Rogers County Public Information Officer

200 S. Lynn Riggs Blvd., Claremore, Oklahoma 74017

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State ARPA funds sought for Inola's wastewater infrastructure

INOLA – Last week, legislators on the Joint Pandemic Relief Committee approved 45 new project proposals for consideration to receive some of the state's federal funding share of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

ARPA is federal funding geared towards helping states recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a joint project between Tulsa Ports, Town of Inola, and Rogers County — the port authority applied for \$14 million of ARPA funding, which met the joint committee's approval in hopes of later getting approval from the full legislature and Gov. Kevin Stitt.

District 3 County Commissioner Ron Burrows — who attended the meeting last week at the State Capital in support of the project — said, "In a small community that has one of the largest industrial parks in the country, the wastewater project is critical for supporting the existing commercial and residential infrastructure. To have this funded would bring about much needed solutions now and going forward."

"Tulsa Ports – Town of Inola Wastewater" project scope includes improvement of the town's current wastewater infrastructure and the construction of a new wastewater treatment plant that will be located inside the Tulsa Port of Inola. The entire wastewater project will cost \$42 million.

The need for these improvements dates to a 2016 Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) consent order placed on the town to address its wastewater issues that have been in constant mitigation. Inola Town Trustee Billy Wilson said this has been a very tedious process that applying for these funds gives the town an opportunity to satisfy DEQ concerns.

Nearly \$10 million of the \$14 million ARPA funding — if approved — is slated to go towards the town's current wastewater treatment infrastructure involving approximately 17,000 feet of replacement piping, around 7,500 feet of new piping, lift station modifications and 77 manhole replacements/repairs. The remaining \$4 million will go towards the new wastewater treatment facility, which is a partnership between the town and Tulsa Ports.

According to information submitted by Andrew Ralston, who leads Tulsa Ports' economic development efforts, the Tulsa Port of Inola developed when Tulsa Ports acquired 2,200 acres rail/barge-served industrial land from Public Service Company of Oklahoma in late 2019. "The only missing utility with industrial capacity for future development is wastewater treatment," Ralston noted. Additionally, "The Tulsa Port of Inola has a multimodal connection of roads, waterways and railways as well as large tracts of available land, making it attractive for new business," he said.

Other confirmed funding sources for the project include:

- \$22.3 million from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA).
- \$5.58 million from Tulsa Ports.
- \$500,000 of Rogers County ARPA share.

The total allocated during last week's meeting was around \$572 million (out of \$1.8 billion) for other ARPA project requests throughout the state.

Upon final approval, the state's executive branch will be responsible distributing the funds, while state agencies will be responsible ensuring strict federal guidelines are adhered to and funding spent appropriately.