



CITY OF WATERTOWN AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST

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Minutes of Watertown Affordable Housing Trust Meeting December 17, 2024 6:00 PM

Attendance

Members present: Cliff Cook, David Leon, Leo Patterson and Helen Oliver. George Proakis, Jill Hyde and Zoe Weinrobe were not present. Non-members present in person or remotely: Larry Field (staff), Alisa Gardner-Todres, Brian Ho, Melissa Santos, Laura, Paula Halpin, Liz Cremens, Susan LaDue, James F., Julie B, Stephanie Venizelos, and Jacky VanLeeuwen.

I. Minutes of October 15 and November 18, 2024 meetings

Minutes of the October 15 and November 18, 2024 meetings were unanimously accepted.

II. WestMetro HOME Consortium Consolidated Plan for 2026-2030 Listening Session

Larry provided background to the public about the WestMetro HOME Consolidated Plan for 2026-2030, which is required by HUD for the member communities to receive federal HOME program funding. Cliff asked for comments from the public.

Jacky VanLeeuwen, a Housing for All Watertown steering committee member, summarized two memos. The first memo contained four recommendations for the Consolidated Plan, including the need for more deeply affordable housing, the need for more mobile vouchers (and landlords willing to accept them) and the recommendation that the city have a housing officer/director focused on housing instability. The second memo contained three recommendations relating to the recent Human Services assessment, including having a physical/digital location and person for tenants and landlords, and a task force on housing instability. The memos are attached.

Melissa Santos said she works at Wayside to assist low income, homeless and immigrant populations. Santos said that more vouchers are needed to reduce rent.

Cliff said that the Trust would continue to accept comments in writing.

III. Update: Watertown-Belmont Church

Larry reported that he and Cliff have approached three affordable housing developers to discuss their potential interest in the Watertown-Belmont Church property. The three developers are very sophisticated, with past projects involving adaptive reuse and in multiple jurisdictions. Two of the three passed on the Church property and noted the

particularly high cost of reusing a religious structure. The third is still considering the site. Larry also reported that the Church has engaged a real estate broker and issued a marketing package that includes the Arrowstreet concept plans.

Cliff added that finding a future community use for the Church's sanctuary is a critical issue and that it remains unclear whether demolition of the 1924/1950 additions (or significant exterior building changes to them) would be allowed by the Historic District Commission.

Leo agreed that clarity from the Historic District Commission would be helpful and that an older building isn't necessarily historic.

IV. Preliminary Planning for 2025 affordable housing incentives study

Larry noted that the city administration committed during the Watertown Square zoning hearings that it would conduct a study of affordable housing incentives during 2025. The current plan is to retain a consultant to conduct the study in late spring and summer, so that potential zoning amendments can be presented to the City Council in fall 2025. The study would focus most on incentives to encourage more and deeper affordability in market rate developments but would also look at incentives for affordable developments. The new incentives for affordable developments (50% or more affordable units) now apply only to the new Watertown Square zones. Larry said it would be critical to have a consultant who understood what would motivate developers and who would be able to test options with financial modeling.

Helen agreed on the need for real estate/financial modeling expertise and said that knowledge of tools that have worked in our area would also be important. Cliff agreed with Helen and added that awareness of local politics would be helpful. Leo asked for more specifics about "more and deeper affordability." Larry said a realistic goal would be to increase the percentage of affordable units in larger market rate projects from 15% to somewhere in the 15-25% range, and to have more units below 65% and 50% of area median income (the current tiers are 80% and 65% of AMI).

V. Other Business

Cliff reported that he and Larry have worked with Watertown Community Conversations on an accessory dwelling unit "community dialogue" event for February 26, 2025.

VI. Executive Session

Cliff said there was information to discuss in executive session pursuant to the provisions of G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(6), particularly to consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property where an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body. The trustees voted unanimously to go into executive session and a motion to adjourn the public meeting passed unanimously at approximately 6:49 PM.