



CITY OF WATERTOWN

AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST

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Minutes of Watertown Affordable Housing Trust Meeting January 21, 2025 6:00 PM

Attendance

Members present: Cliff Cook, David Leon, Leo Patterson, Jill Hyde and Helen Oliver. George Proakis and Zoe Weinrobe were not present. Non-members present in person or remotely: Larry Field (staff), Alisa Gardner-Todres and Jacky VanLeeuwen.

I. Minutes of December 17, 2024 meetings

Minutes of the December 17, 2024 meeting were unanimously accepted.

II. Watertown Affordable Housing Trust Strategic Plan for 2025

Cliff led a discussion of the Trust's strategic plan for the coming year. There was a consensus that the proposed changes reflected the body's upcoming initiatives. The trustees voted unanimously to adopt the plan (final version attached).

III. Annual Action Plan—WestMetro HOME Consortium

Larry summarized how the annual action plan-- required by HUD for communities receiving federal HOME funding—fit into the framework of local and HOME plans. He noted that the annual action plan is for the 2026 federal fiscal year. This year's proposed plan includes an intent to use the city's annual \$110,000 allocation for one or more of the following projects: Willow Park, 103 Nichols Ave and 1060 Belmont Street (as part of its major recapitalization).

Jill asked whether the list of projects indicated that they were only the projects that would be considered or whether there would be a competitive process. Larry said the wording was designed to provide the Trust with the flexibility to consider a project request on its own or issue a call for proposals. Leo asked whether the annual allocation could be used for a homelessness program; Larry said it was an eligible use. Alisa Gardner-Todres said, based on experience at Metro West Collaborative and elsewhere, the HUD regulations make it almost impossible to use for that purpose.

Jill moved to adopt the annual action plan, David seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Further Discussion of affordable housing incentives study

Larry noted that the Council's Committee on Human Services agenda included "Discussion with the affordable housing trust regarding the upcoming Affordable

Housing Study.” He said Cliff would attend the meeting representing the Trust and that George and/or Steve Magoon would attend to represent the administration. Cliff’s participation would be informed by the Trust’s discussion at the December 17, 2024 meeting and at today’s meeting.

At the December meeting, the trustees agreed that real estate/financial modeling expertise would be chief among the essential qualifications for the consultant. The purpose of today’s discussion, Larry said, was to focus on what questions should be answered by the study.

The trustees agreed that the following questions should be covered by the study:

- 1) What cost elements can be lowered by municipal actions (e.g., zoning and permitting process changes)?
- 2) What is the difference in revenue streams for market rate and affordable units (quantifying the gap that must be addressed by a market rate developer)?
- 3) What have other municipalities successfully done to encourage affordability (in both market rate and affordable developments)?
- 4) What geographic areas of the city outside the Watertown Square area would be suitable for incentives directed at affordable developments and what level/type of incentives would be appropriate?

During the discussion, there were questions by two trustees and one member of the public about whether the study would be/should be limited to market rate developments. Larry said 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. While Cliff expressed concern about including both development types in the same study, the trustees generally agreed that both should be covered. Helen and Jill noted that it could be a consultant team and/or the study could explicitly have two prongs.

V. Other Business

Larry reported that the accessory dwelling unit “community dialogue” event with Watertown Community Conversations needed to be re-scheduled to March 24, 2025. He also reported that the WestMetro HOME Consortium would be issuing a fair housing report in February, based on testing done in multiple communities, including Watertown. The testing concerns income discrimination and race/national origin discrimination. There will be public meetings about the report: an in-person meeting in Newton on February 26 and a remote meeting the week of February 17.

VI. Executive Session

There was no executive session. The trustees voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at approximately 7:15 PM.

Watertown Affordable Housing Trust Strategic Plan for 2025

Watertown's Housing Plan (2021-25) contains six goals and 25 strategies. In order to establish its priorities, this strategic plan identifies the Watertown Affordable Housing Trust's primary initiatives for the coming year:

- (1) The Trust's highest priority continues to be promoting a pipeline of projects eligible for federal/state funding. This will require identification of feasible sites, affordable development partners, and local funding sources. These projects may be 100% affordable or be sufficiently mixed income to qualify for federal/state funding.
- (2) The Trust will assist the Department of Community Development and Planning on a consultant-conducted study to assess and propose incentives to increase/deepen affordable housing production.
- (3) The Trust will develop and propose a draft zoning amendment ordinance allowing accessory dwelling units.
- (4) The Trust will develop a Housing Plan for 2026-2030.

The Trust's work in 2025 will also include continuing responsibilities, such as reviewing project proposals that include inclusionary zoning units, Watertown's participation in the WestMetro HOME Consortium, consideration of ways to support affordable housing projects by others (e.g., the Watertown Housing Authority), and additional policy recommendations as needed.