



**Watertown City Council
Committee on Human Services
Wednesday, August 19, 2024**

Members Present: Councilor Tony Palomba, Chair; Councilor Caroline Bays, Vice Chair; and Councilor John Gannon, Secretary

The Committee on Human Services held a public meeting on August 19, 2024, at 6:00pm to discuss the following re-appointments to the Watertown Affordable Housing Trust:

- Reappoint Clifford Cook as a member of the Affordable Housing Trust to a term expiring June 30, 2026;
- Reappoint Helen Oliver as a member of the Affordable Housing Trust to a term expiring June 30, 2026; and
- Reappoint Zoe Weinrobe as a member of the Affordable Housing Trust to a term expiring June 30, 2026.

Call to Order

Committee Chair Palomba called the meeting to order at 6:00pm and introduced the other committee members present: Caroline Bays, Vice Chair; and John Gannon, Secretary. Also present at various during the meeting were Clifford Cook, Helen Oliver and Zoe Weinrobe.

The Committee first interviewed Clifford Cook. Prior to his service on the Affordable Housing Trust, Mr. Cook was a member of the Watertown Housing Partnership. Chair Palomba asked Mr. Clifford how the relatively new Affordable Housing Trust was going. Mr. Clifford stated that the Trust was successful in organizing as a board and creating an inventory of potential sites for the creation of affordable housing. The Trust also spoke with owners of potential sites for affordable housing including the entity that runs the Belmont/Watertown Methodist Church on Mt. Auburn Street that is presently for sale. The Trust is potentially close in choosing one location for the creation of affordable housing. The Trust has also spoken of other affordable housing possibilities, including the recent signing into law of state legislation allowing for the creation of accessory dwelling units by right, without the need for zoning. Mr. Cook would like to see the creation of affordable housing at 65% and 80% AMI. Mr. Cook would like to see affordable housing built at the Belmont/Watertown Methodist Church, but it would be a complicated project

Action Item 1: Councilor Gannon made a motion that the full Council vote to approve Clifford Cook for re-appointment as a member of the Affordable Housing Trust for a term expiring on June 30, 2026. Councilor Bays seconded the motion. The motion passed by a vote of 3-0.

The Committee interviewed Helen Oliver next. Prior to her service on the Affordable Housing Trust, Ms. Oliver was also a member of the Watertown Housing Partnership. Chair Palomba asked Ms. Oliver her thoughts on the accomplishments of the Trust so far. Ms. Oliver is enthused about the resources available to the Trust, including access to architectural resources to review potential properties for the creation of affordable housing and that the Trust completed an inventory of potential sites for the creation of affordable housing. She stated that the Trust discussed the possibility of affordable housing creation through the recent signing of the accessory dwelling unit law. She also discussed the potential use of tax credits to spur affordable housing creation possibilities. When asked about the success of Watertown's adoption of linkage fee payments to create affordable housing, she stated that market timing stalled development that would pay linkage fee revenue, but there are possibilities for the future.

Action Item 2: Councilor Gannon made a motion that the full Council vote to approve Helen Oliver for re-appointment as a member of the Affordable Housing Trust for a term expiring on June 30, 2026. Councilor Bays seconded the motion. The motion passed by a vote of 3-0.

The Committee next interviewed Zoe Weinrobe as the final candidate for re-appointment as a member of the Affordable Housing Trust. Ms. Weinrobe is professionally dedicated to the field of affordable housing finance and development. She previously served as a housing planner for the City of Cambridge Planning Department and helped manage affordable housing issues. She stated that the Affordable Housing Trust has made great progress so far. Trustees have created the affordable housing inventory, consulted with architects and site engineers on potential properties, reached out directly to property owners. Trustees have thoroughly reviewed over a dozen potential properties for the creation of affordable housing. She likes the Watertown Housing Authority's redevelopment of the Willow Park complex and the reputation of the non-profit organization that will partner with the Housing Authority to complete the redevelopment. She stated that she would like to have the Affordable Housing Trust develop an affordable housing property; while there is desire to move forward, there are presently limits on the financing that would be required to do so, however.

Action Item 3: Councilor Bays made a motion that the full Council vote to approve Zoe Weinrobe for re-appointment as a member of the Affordable Housing Trust for a term expiring on June 30, 2026. Councilor Gannon seconded the motion. The motion passed by a vote of 3-0.

Councilor Gannon made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councilor Bays. The motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

The meeting concluded at 7:00pm.

Minutes prepared by John Gannon

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Anthony Palomba,
Chair

Caroline Bays,
Vice Chair

John G. Gannon,
Secretary