



CITY OF WATERTOWN

AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST

Administration Building
149 Main Street
Watertown, MA 02472
Phone: 617 972 6417
Fax: 617 972 6484
www.watertown-ma.gov

Minutes of Watertown Affordable Housing Trust Meeting February 18, 2025 6:00 PM

Attendance

Members present: Cliff Cook, David Leon, Leo Patterson, Jill Hyde and Zoe Weinrobe. George Proakis and Helen Oliver were not present. Non-members present in person or remotely: Larry Field (staff), Alisa Gardner-Todres, Jackie Sullivan, Josh Rosmarin, Jamie Gordon, Mark Krackiewicz, Jacky VanLeeuwen, and Libby Shaw (who entered late because of an error in the posted Zoom link).

I. Minutes of January 21, 2025 meeting

Minutes of the January 21, 2025 meeting were unanimously accepted.

II. Fair Housing

A. WestMetro HOME Consortium Fair Housing Report

Larry provided background on the WestMetro HOME Consortium's fair housing report issued February 28, 2025. The Consortium issued a Request for Proposals in 2022 for a testing program and choose Suffolk Law School's Housing Discrimination Testing Program. Suffolk's experience in testing includes a regional study for the Boston Foundation in 2022, which found substantial discrimination throughout the region.

The study found: 1) at least one case of source of income and/or race discrimination in each of the 13 communities, 2) four communities with four discrimination cases (Belmont, Brookline, Waltham, Wayland), and 3) Watertown with five cases (three source of income, two race discrimination). The study can be read [here](#).

There were questions about the test batches referred to the MCAD (one batch including Watertown resulted in an written notice to the realty company and the other batch including Watertown is pending) and about why discrimination against persons with a disability was not tested (WestMetro decided to focus on source of income and race because they were perceived to be the most common in the 13 community region).

B. Discuss initial responsive steps

Larry said that the Consortium would be discussing a further round of testing at its May meeting. While Watertown and several other communities said at the February Consortium meeting that they want further testing funded using their HOME administrative funds, others needed to check with their supervisors before agreeing to a second round. Larry said it would be helpful to have authorization to use Trust funds for

further testing in the event that a minority of Consortium members were willing to proceed. Zoe moved to authorize spending up to \$10,000 and Jill seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

The trustees discussed working with the Watertown Human Rights Commission to offer fair housing training to property owners and realtors. Larry said the national and state realtor organizations offered robust training programs but there is nothing that is specifically centered on Watertown. Jill and Zoe emphasized reaching out to smaller landlords and their realtors. Leo suggested working with the Charles River Regional Chamber of Commerce. The trustees agreed that Larry should work on training to be held in fall 2025.

The trustees also suggested that Larry look into working with local realtors to encourage property owners to accept vouchers and/or to encourage owners/tenants sign up for the SNO Mass program. Jacky VanLeeuwen said she has talked with the Watertown Business Coalition and thinks that it would be willing to help with educational events and with encouraging property owners to accept vouchers.

III. Updates

A. Willow Park redevelopment 40B application

Larry said that since the last meeting: 1) the City Council accepted the Community Preservation Committee's recommendation that the Willow Park project receive a \$4 million commitment for construction funding, 2) the Trust's \$400,000 grant agreement was signed and the project's invoice is in process, 3) the state issued the Project Eligibility Letter, and 4) the Chapter 40B application was filed with a request to be heard by the Zoning Board of Appeals on March 26, 2025. Unfortunately, the state did not invite the project into the winter funding round. The WHA/POAH will re-apply for the next winter funding round.

The Chapter 40B process includes a "call for comments" by all relevant local boards and commissions. The Willow Park redevelopment project, therefore, will be on the Trust's March agenda for discussion.

B. Watertown-Belmont Church marketing

The Church's broker sent out notice today of a March 7, 2025 deadline for offers. The Church property has garnered interest from a range of parties, from other religious users to affordable and market rate developers.

C. Assessory Dwelling Units Community Dialogue (March 24)

The ADU Community Dialogue event will be March 24. Cliff and Larry will do a substantive presentation on the issue and Watertown Community Conversations will facilitate a question-and-answer segment and breakout groups.

D. Other Business

There was no additional business.

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 7:08 PM.