



CITY OF WATERTOWN AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST

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Minutes of Watertown Affordable Housing Trust Meeting June 23, 2025 6:00 PM

Attendance

Members present: Cliff Cook, David Leon, Jill Hyde, Zoe Weinrobe, George Proakis and Helen Oliver. Members not present: Leo Patterson. Non-members present in person or remotely: Larry Field (staff), Alisa Gardner-Todres, Adam Schultz, Sam Gilardi, Anthony Palomba, Jacky van Leeuwen, Kristen Duffy, Jacob Smith and Brian Ho.

I. **Minutes of May 20, 2025 meeting**

Minutes of the May 20, 2025 meeting were unanimously accepted.

II. **Continued discussion of Watertown Housing Plan 2026-2030**

A. Public Comments

Public comments delivered orally included:

- Jacky van Leeuwen/representing Housing for All Watertown: likes the idea of more measurable, actionable items; there should be a priority to create units for households below 50% of area median income (AMI); “income-based” units (rents set at 30% of the tenant’s actual income) should be explored; more housing staff needed; work with Watertown Housing Authority on using its land for more affordable units; expand opportunities for voucher holders; use a notice of fund availability to attract site owners; promote fair housing; create a “one-stop” for housing issues at the new Human Services Department; a housing task force should be convened.
- Alisa Gardner-Todres/Metro West Collaborative: exercise caution in increasing inclusionary zoning requirements to avoid discouraging development; consider a fee in lieu to deepen affordability rather than increasing the unit requirements; look at surplus public land; emergency funding for capital needs is important.
- Kristen Duffy/Metro West Collaborative: preserving affordable units is key.
- Sam Gilardi: likes more measurable/actionable items; modernize multifamily zoning rules (e.g., more by right) and expand area where multifamily allowed; make it easier for homeowners to expand living space; extend inclusionary zoning requirements to smaller developments.
- Brian Ho: the Community Preservation Committee and Trust should agree on an annual allocation to the Trust for affordable housing.

Larry summarized and read portions of three comments (attached) from Jackie Sullivan/Housing Authority, Sophia Suarez-Friedman/Wayside, and Kevin Ryan.

B. Trust discussion of plan goals and strategies

Cliff said that tonight's meeting was to collect ideas and not make any decisions. He said Larry will digest the public comments/tonight's discussion and return with a draft. Cliff then shared his thoughts on the goals and strategies:

- 1) He would aim for a slimmer plan, with well-defined and actionable strategies. It is important to think about the resources required for each.
- 2) He would like to simplify the goals, e.g., by combining #1 and #2; make them clearer, e.g., by focusing #4 on the private market; and possibly create a goal for supporting individual households and promoting fair housing. The city's ability to provide financial assistance, however, may be limited.

George said that direct financial assistance for households is hard to maintain over an extended period because of its impact on affordable housing resources. We know that production of affordable units provides a long-term solution for those households, he said. The city can also provide technical assistance which can make a difference at a much lower and sustainable cost. Cliff said he agreed with George on direct assistance. They each noted that the capacity of nearby communities like Cambridge and Somerville are far greater, even considering relative size. Jill said she would separate fair housing and household assistance.

Several trustees agreed with streamlining the plan and focusing on specific things that could be accomplished within five years.

Helen wondered whether the plan should articulate an advocacy role for the Trust and, if so, how to make that activity measurable. In that context, Cliff asked whether this should be viewed as a Trust or City plan. Larry noted that the 2021-2025 plan was adopted by the City, making it a City plan. The Trust has approved a strategic plan for itself each year. Zoe thought it was important to be clear on whether this is proposed as the city's plan.

David urged that the universal design strategy (3B) be more actionable.

Several trustees agreed that the relationship between the Trust and the Community Preservation Committee should be included. It was noted that communities differ in how CPA funds are allocated for affordable housing, with some transferring money to their housing trust and some interested in direct involvement in proposed projects.

George said he was interested in the idea of using an in lieu payment to deepen affordability. He said that Somerville was against in lieu payments but maybe that could work in Watertown.

III. Community Preservation Committee public hearing June 26, 2025

Cliff said he will appear and testify at the CPC's annual hearing on June 26, 2025. He will discuss the good relationship that has developed, appreciate the CPC's commitment to the Willow Park project and offer to share the housing data being developed for the plan. Cliff asked if anything else should be conveyed. Zoe was glad that Cliff was testifying and emphasized the importance of a true partnership between the bodies.

IV. Other Business

There was no other business.

VI. Executive Session

There was a motion to go into EXECUTIVE SESSION-PUBLIC MEETING WILL NOT RECONVENE pursuant to the provisions of G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(6) 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 motion passed 5-0 (Zoe Weinrobe not voting). The public meeting ended at approximately 7:12 PM.

Written public comments on Housing Plan 2026-2030 Goals and Strategies for June 23, 2025 meeting

1) From Jackie Sullivan, Executive Director of Housing Authority

Would it be possible to explore using HOME Consortium funds or other available resources to create a rental assistance prevention program? Strategy 5D indicates they have explored this and is nearing its end.

When RAFT is not an option, we see a high need for smaller awards that low-income families could use to prevent increased rental arrears or eviction. Olivia, the Director of Resident Services, has been discussing this emerging need with the Watertown Community Foundation. They awarded us \$18,000, which helped reduce the arrears of families that weren't yet eligible for RAFT due to the lack of a Notice to Quit. While that support was impactful, we are seeing a growing need for a fund that individuals, families, and older adults can access proactively, before they are forced to choose between paying rent and meeting basic needs.

2) From Sophia Suarez-Friedman, LICSW, clinician and SSRS Program Coordinator, Wayside Multi-Service Center

From looking at the "Worksheet for Discussion of 2026-2030 Housing Plan" here are some of my thoughts:

1D - Take further steps to ensure WSQ plan includes affordable housing as proposed

2C - more work in this area to increase affordable housing opportunities

3C - would it be possible to put funding towards this?

4D - very important!

5D - could this be in conjunction with the new Human Services Director?

3) Kevin Ryan

I support the goals and strategies as presented in the 2020 Housing Plan. Only minor updates are needed, some of which are highlighted below.

Two points of general feedback:

First, I would like the City to put more resources behind the goals to make better progress. Some good progress has been made, but frustratingly little for a five year period. Consider hiring additional housing staff either in the Planning and/or Human Service departments. Consider putting more city dollars to housing to supplement existing programs or to create new programs for homeownership and rental assistance as part of the budgeting process. Subcommittees of the

Affordable Housing Trust should be formed and each goal assigned to a subcommittee. The subcommittees could include individuals from other City committees and community members at large as needed.

Second, the goals should be more specific and measurable. Instead of the current language of "increase housing opportunities affordable for lower income households" a specific number of units should be committed to in a specific time frame at specific income targeting e.g. create 200 additional units targeted at 80% of AMI by 2030.

Feedback on current goals and strategies:

1. Update Strategy 1A since the Affordable Housing Trust (AHT) has been established to focus on the AHT finding resources for more rapid housing response and identifying additional funding. I propose two new strategies:

New Strategy 1A. For the AHT to coordinate with the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) to most effectively use CPA funds for housing. Under current strategy 4B the plan states the City will leverage CPA funds for housing. I'd like to see a strategy for the AHT and CPC to coordinate and determine the right amount of funding, for what purpose, and at what interval funds can be transferred from the CPC to the AHT.

4) New Strategy 1B. Related, but not limited to CPA funds. I'd like to see a strategy for the Affordable Housing Trust to explore the most effective housing assistance program for Watertown, identify funding, and implement it. This could be an amendment to current strategy 5D which is "to evaluate a rental assistance programs"

2. Under current *goal #2: Housing for less than 60% AMI* add a strategy to provide resources to subsidize inclusionary zoning units and other affordable units even further when necessary to make them charge income based rents to ensure households pay 30% of their actual income, not 30% of 80% of AMI as is currently the case where they are subject to drastic rent increases.

3. Under current *goal #2: Housing for less than 60% AMI* add a strategy to provide resources to create units for 30% AMI and below.