



CITY OF WATERTOWN

AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST

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Minutes of Watertown Affordable Housing Trust Meeting January 20, 2026 6:00 PM

Attendance

Members present: Cliff Cook, David Leon, Jill Hyde, Leo Patterson and Zoe Weinrobe. Members not present: George Proakis and Helen Oliver. Non-members present in person or remotely: Larry Field (staff), Will Downie (staff), Barney Heath, Jacky van Leeuwen, Kristen Duffy, Joan Gumbleton, Linda Scott, and Kate Coyne.

I. Minutes of December 16, 2025 meeting

The minutes of the December 16, 2025 meetings were unanimously approved.

II. Strategic Plan for 2026

Larry summarized the proposed strategic plan for 2026. Of the five bulleted priorities, #1 is the same as last year (site identification), and #2 (incentive study), #3 (2026-2030 Housing Plan, and #5 (ADU zoning) update the status of these initiatives.

#4 proposes that the Trust consider applying to the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) for a grant. Staff think the best fit between the CPC's process for reviewing funding requests and the Trust search for an affordable housing site is an application that creates a reserve controlled by the Trust. The reserve would provide funds for the Trust to enable site control at such time as a suitable site is identified. An application would allow the Trust to articulate the rationale for such a reserve and propose parameters—and for the CPC to review each. Larry said staff would provide a specific proposal to the trustees, including a specific funding amount and proposed parameters.

Zoe said she would like the Trust to be more aggressive in any funding request to the CPC. She suggested the Trust ask for an annual allocation of 10 to 15% of the CPC's new funds. Larry said that while several municipalities make an annual allocation to their affordable housing trust, generally there has first been a development track record. He also noted that the more significant barrier, so far, has been finding a site. Zoe said that obtaining site control over a 60-90 day period to allow due diligence is not expensive. She would like to see funding that would allow control for a longer period and provide a chunk of pre-development money. Otherwise, she said, the project would still be delayed by the need to go through a full CPC process. Larry suggested "and pre-development funding" be added to bullet #4.

Zoe moved, with Jill seconding the motion, that the Trust adopt the proposed 2026 Strategic Plan with the proposed change in bullet #4. The motion passed 5-0.

Because of technical difficulties, Jacky van Leeuwen could not comment on the plan until after the vote. She urged the Trust to seek an annual allocation of 20-25%.

III. **Annual Action Plan for HOME program**

Larry provided background on the purpose and process for approving an Annual Action Plan for the HOME program. He said the plan mostly responds to HUD questions on the city's affordable housing work. While the plan can also identify specific projects to be funded during the year, the city does not yet have sufficient information to do that. The city can approve the draft plan and make changes before the WestMetro HOME Consortium submits the compiled document in May. He said Metro West Collaborative likely will request funding for 1060 Belmont Street before HUD submission.

Jill moved, with Zoe seconding the motion, that the Trust adopt the draft Annual Action Plan. The motion passed 5-0.

IV. **Update on residential projects in pipeline**

Will provided the following update on residential projects:

- 33 Mount Auburn Street was approved by the Planning Board as the first by-right project in the Transit Oriented Development Overlay (TODO), the new MBTA Communities overlay district (six affordable units).
- 108 Water Street project was approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals (eight affordable units).
- 72 Mt Auburn Street requested a continuance at the January Planning Board meeting (payment in lieu for affordable housing).
- 45-59 Mount Auburn Street had a developer's conference in October and filed a demolition application. The Historical Commission imposed a 2-year delay on October 9, 2025.
- Rear Franklin/Washburn also filed a demolition application. The Historical Commission imposed a 2-year delay on November 13, 2025.
- 104 Main Street is expected to be completed in summer 2026.

Larry noted that the Historical Commission hopes to find a solution that would preserve the historically significant homes while allowing the projects to proceed.

Will reported that the Planning Board has approved 10 accessory dwelling unit applications since the city allowed ADUs in November 2024. Two of these have building permits. The approved ADUs are generally within the building (attic or basement), with one or two attached additions. Zoe noted that the cost of a detached ADU is in the \$400,000 to \$500,000 range.

David, Zoe, and Cliff all agreed that updates on the residential development pipeline are helpful and requested that staff provide periodic updates on residential projects going forward.

V. Other Business

Cliff said that the time period to provide written comments on the affordable housing incentives study, including potential incentives to test, has been extended to January 31, 2026. Comments can be emailed to lfield@watertown-ma.gov.

VI. Executive Session

No executive session was necessary. The meeting adjourned at approximately 7 PM.

Watertown Affordable Housing Trust Strategic Plan for 2026

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 continue to assist the Department of Community Development and Planning on a consultant-conducted study to assess and propose incentives to increase/deepen affordable housing production. Once the study is completed, the Trust will work with DCDP to evaluate and implement the study recommendations.
 - (3) The Trust will finalize and adopt a Housing Plan for 2026-2030. The Trust may revisit the 2026 Strategic Plan once the new Housing Plan is adopted.
 - (4) The Trust will consider applying to the Community Preservation Committee for a grant that would create a reserve for the Trust to enable site control and pre-development funding at such time that a suitable affordable housing location is identified.
- (4) The Trust will continue to assist DCDP in drafting more detailed zoning language allowing accessory dwelling units.

The Trust's work in 2026 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.