



# CITY OF WATERTOWN AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST

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## Minutes of Watertown Affordable Housing Trust Meeting March 17, 2026 6:00 PM

### Attendance

Members present: Cliff Cook, David Leon, Jill Hyde, Leo Patterson, Zoe Weinrobe, George Proakis and Helen Oliver. Non-members present in person or remotely: Larry Field (staff), Will Downie (staff), Jacky van Leeuwen, Brian Ho, Alisa Gardner-Todreas, and Mark Krackiewicz.

### I. **Minutes of February 17, 2026 meeting**

The minutes of the February 17, 2026 meetings were unanimously approved.

### II. **Housing Plan 2026-2030**

Larry introduced discussion of the draft Housing Plan for 2026-2030. He said the goal of tonight's meeting is to obtain comments from the trustees and public on an "almost complete" plan. He and Will expect that a final draft will be ready for a vote at the April meeting. In addition to collecting comments tonight, written comments are invited through March 31, 2026.

Larry went through the draft to point out what is new and what has been reviewed at prior meetings. He noted that there is still a placeholder for Strategy #4 as we wait for MAPC's study of affordable housing incentives and that Strategies #11 and #12 reflect a more realistic expectation of when the accessory dwelling unit zoning will be updated.

Cliff said that discussion would start with two questions that he would frame and four questions that Will would frame. Thereafter, trustees and then members of the public would be able to provide additional comments.

#### Sources of housing crisis (p. 5)

Cliff asked whether the existing text adequately described why the regional housing crisis developed. The trustees agreed that text on demographic changes, cost of construction, interest rates, etc. should be added.

#### What income levels are supported by inclusionary units (p. 17)

Cliff asked whether the existing text clearly described the issue of households qualifying for the inclusionary zoning units at 80% AMI but unable to afford those units. The trustees agreed that the text should more clearly convey that income-eligible households still need to show ability to pay the rent and that their ability to pay can change as rents rise.

#### Whether inclusionary zoning is meeting the need for deeper affordability

Will noted that Table 10-11 show that a significant percentage of Watertown households are cost-burdened. He asked whether the City should evaluate changes in the inclusionary zoning requirements. The trustees agreed that such an evaluation should be included in the plan—but it was also noted that there may be a trade-off involved in deeper affordability (i.e., fewer affordable units if more are at or below 65%). Zoe suggested that the city also consider using a rent-setting formula that does not allow maximums at the 80% and 65% AMI levels for renewing tenants.

#### Meeting the housing needs of the senior population

Will said that the plan does not specifically address housing for the city's large (and growing) percentage of seniors. Strategy #6 discusses supportive services and universal design, which can benefit seniors, but also younger households with those needs. The trustees agreed that the plan should include language on developing more housing for seniors, i.e., specifically addressing the need for such housing.

#### Older housing stock

Will asked whether the trustees would support exploring a potential program to aid owners in older housing stock so they could address issues like lead paint and updating utilities. He noted that the City received federal funds for such capital improvements in the early 2000s and that nearby communities have used federal CDBG funds (which Watertown does not receive) for this. Several trustees, including David and Zoe, pointed out challenges associated with such a program.

#### Rising percentage of residents with limited English

Given the data on residents with limited English, Will asked whether this issue should be more fully addressed in the plan. George noted that the City is planning to add translation capability to the website. The trustees agreed that this issue should be included in Strategy #10 on educational assistance.

Cliff then asked the trustees for further comments. David suggested that Strategy #6B include the word "minimum" to the sentence on accessibility requirements. Leo asked about whether Strategy #5A (full-time housing planner within three years) was realistic. George said the City is already moving in this direction by allowing Will to focus more on housing issues and using Larry part-time.

Members of the public made the following comments:

- Jacky VanLeeuwen urged the plan to include restrictive zoning as a cause of the housing crisis, to increase focus on creating 100% affordable developments, to

emphasize the need for smaller units, and to keep pushing for more staff capacity.

- Alisa Gardner-Todreas said, based on her experience at Metro West Collaborative, that the difference between an 80% AMI rent and market rent is often very narrow. Some households who qualify for 80% AMI affordable units are unwilling to go through the invasiveness of income certification and instead pay market rent. This further thins the households who both qualify based on AMI and can document ability to pay their portion of the rent. She agreed with Jacky about the importance of smaller units for seniors and younger households. She also said that the city's permitting process and the state's "local action unit" approval process should be streamlined.
- In response to this comment, George noted that if Alisa was referring to the two-step special permit process in certain zoning districts, there are pros and cons to having both boards involved. Alisa said greater clarity would help and Jacky said that developers are frustrated by overly detailed review.
- Mark Krackiewicz generally commended the draft plan and offered three suggestions. Mark thought there should be clearer language about the \$6 million in CPA funds for Willow Park, as it represents a major step in use of such funds for affordable housing in Watertown. He said that the discussion of collaboration between the CPC and the Trust should include the latter's interest in filing a funding application (included in the Trust's 2026 Strategic Plan). Finally, he said that data on residents who also work in Watertown would be useful information. Staff said all three of those suggestions would be incorporated.

### III. **Update: March 26, 2026 Public Meeting on Affordable Housing Incentives Study**

The MAPC consultant team will be presenting the preliminary results of its testing of potential affordable housing incentives on March 26, 2026 at 6 PM in the Lower Hearing Room. The meeting will include both in-person and online opportunities for public participation.

### IV. **Other Business**

There was no other business.

### VI. **Executive Session**

No executive session was necessary. The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:37 PM.