



CITY OF WATERTOWN AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST

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Minutes of Watertown Affordable Housing Trust Meeting May 19, 2026, 6:00 PM

Attendance

Members present: Cliff Cook, David Leon, Jill Hyde, Leo Patterson and Helen Oliver, Zoe Weinrobe, George Proakis. Members not present: none. Non-members present in person or remotely: Larry Field (staff), Will Downie (staff), Jacky van Leeuwen, Whitney Sands, Dennis J. Duff.

I. **Minutes of April 21, 2026 meeting**

The minutes of the April 21, 2026 meeting were unanimously approved.

II. **Potential funding application to Community Preservation Committee for affordable housing site control and pre-development reserve**

Will provided an overview of the Outline for CPC Funding Application prepared by staff. The outline proposes the AHT submit an application to the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) for \$530,000 in Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to establish an 'affordable housing site control and pre-development reserve'. The goal of the proposed reserve is to assist affordable developers obtain site control and conduct pre-development work to support an application to the CPC for additional funding. Staff spoke to several affordable developers active in Watertown and the region to inform the outline.

There are three general pathways to site plan control. In the first model, developers outright purchase a site with a short due diligence period. In a patient seller model, the seller allows a long option period. This is generally the preferred path for affordable developers but is less common. There is also a short-leash model, where the seller agrees to a 6-8 month option period. The proposed reserve would be most useful for the patient seller and short-leash models, but is helpful for any of the pathways.

The reserve would provide funds for two related processes. First to obtain site control, including a deposit to hold the site for a 60-90 day due diligence period. Then an additional deposit to extend the option beyond the initial period. Second, funding for initial due diligence such as environmental review, title research and feasibility analysis. Then, additional funding for initial engineering, architectural and other services to assist in permitting and applying to the CPC.

The full CPC application would include additional details including the review process and likely criteria for review, information sharing and reporting to the CPC, and disposition of the funds. Will stated that if the Trust votes to approve the outline, Staff will work with the Chair to submit a project eligibility application and full application for the CPC's Fiscal Year 2027 application cycle.

Zoe stated that she felt good about the outline as written and had the opportunity to review an earlier draft and provided information to Staff. She noted that this reserve can help get a few projects underway, build a record of the AHT as an effective body, and build a stronger relationship with the CPC. She hoped this was an interim measure, and in the long-term the Trust will have sustained funding from linkage fees, or an on-going allocation of CPA funds.

George stated that asking for a limited fund to support acquiring sites was a reasonable approach. The AHT does have some existing funds, including an allocation from the City's budgeting process. However, the options for additional funds are limited, so it makes sense to build a modest fund to allow the Trust to act. George re-iterated that affordable housing trusts are unique in their ability to work quickly with a developer to secure sites as they enter the market without needing City Council authorization to spend funds.

Trustees agreed that it is important for the Trust to establish rules, procedures, and application requirements, and determine how the Trust will assess a project's viability. Jill expressed concern that some applicants might apply with speculative plans just because the funds are available. Cliff noted that the Trust has not recently received funding requests from developers without site control. Jill said she thinks the Trust may see more such proposals as developers feel more confident.

Cliff asked if the proposed funding amounts were sufficient to achieve the reserve's goals and tie down a site. Zoe clarified that this funding is enough to allow a developer to get their foot in the door and make a decision on a site. Anything else would require the CPC. Jill and Zoe said the deposit amount is dependent on several factors.

George asked about the specific funding amount and Leo asked how long the CPC can allocate the funds and why the outline specified 3 years. Will clarified the number is the sum of the specific cost items in the analysis. Will acknowledged, and several trustees concurred, that actual costs would depend on the specific project. Will added 3 years was considered an appropriate time period for discussing disposition of any unused funds with the CPC and will need to be worked on in the full application.

Cliff opened the floor to comments from the public. Dennis J. Duff stated that CPA funds are not free and come from the taxpayers of Watertown. He stated that the City has land it can build on and asked why not allow larger scale buildings in the West End.

Trustees agreed they must be judicious in the use of any CPA funds awarded. George stated that he is not opposed to using City owned land for affordable housing.

Dennis asked why development was being taken on by the AHT and not the Watertown Housing Authority (WHA). Cliff stated the AHT would not be the developer. Housing authorities generally focus on owning and managing housing and providing social services for residents. Reduced federal funding and the Faircloth amendment have limited new public housing development. When housing authorities redevelop sites they partner with other entities who bring funding, as WHA did for Willow Park. Zoe added that redeveloping public housing is significantly more costly than a nonprofit acquiring and developing a site. Trustees agreed that research shows that the long-term outcomes for young people raised in mixed income developments are generally better compared to large-scale public housing.

Dennis asked if the Trust needs to involve the City Council in allocating their funding. While the City Council must approve any CPC award, George clarified that the AHT would not need a further City Council vote to use the site control/pre-development reserve.

Dennis encouraged the Trust to think outside of the box and develop its own voucher program. Cliff and George noted that municipal voucher programs can be financially challenging and can cause instability for the households they serve.

Cliff proposed a motion prepared in advance. Zoe moved, and David seconded:

Authorized the Chair and Staff to draft and submit an eligibility form and full funding application to the Community Preservation Committee for the creation of a pre-development reserve fund as detailed in the Outline for CPC Funding Application prepared by staff, and to represent the Trust at any CPC meetings related to said application.

The motion passed 7-0.

III. Updates

A. Housing Plan 2026-2030

Will stated that the Housing Plan 2026-2030 was submitted to the Watertown City Council. The Plan was referred to the Committees on Human Services and Economic Development and Planning during the Council's May 12 meeting.

B. Affordable Housing Incentives Study

Will stated that the Metropolitan Area Planning Council is finalizing the study. The study was to the Committee on Human Services during the Council's May 12 meeting.

C. Local Preference Policy

Will stated that the City adopted the current local preference policy (i.e., new rental developments seek state approval for use of a 50% local preference for affordable units at initial lease) five years ago. Will noted that there has only been one local preference lottery since the policy was adopted, limiting extrapolation. Will recommended the AHT postpone review for a few months until data from the 104 Main lottery is available. Trustees agreed it made sense to wait for further review.

Zoe asked about the local preference request for the Willow Park development. Will clarified that the maximum 70% allowed local preference was requested due to the significant City investment.

II. Other Business

Cliff reminded the Trustees and those attending that the Watertown Square Open House was occurring at 9 Galen Street from 3:00pm to 8:00pm.

VI. Executive Session

No executive session was necessary. The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:00 PM.