



**Watertown City Council
Committee on Human Services**

Councilor Palomba-Chair, Councilor Bays-Vice Chair, Councilor Izzo- Secretary

**Committee Report of July 15, 2026 Meeting
Presented to the City Council on August 11, 2026**

The Committee on Health and Human Services convened on Wednesday, July 15, 2026 at 5:30 p.m. in the City Council Office. Present were Councilor Anthony Palomba, Chair, Councilor Caroline Bays, Vice Chair, and Councilor Emily Izzo, Secretary.

The purpose of the meeting was to conduct reappointment interviews for the Watertown Affordable Housing Trust and the Council on Aging.

Cliff Cook Interview

Mr. Cook has served as Chair of the Affordable Housing Trust for the past four years. He identified the development of the Trust's publication of the Watertown Housing Plan as one of its most significant accomplishments, explaining that it provides a roadmap for many of the initiatives the Trust has undertaken. He also highlighted the Trust's financial support of the Willow Park project and emphasized the hands-on role the Trust plays throughout the affordable housing development process. Rather than simply reviewing completed proposals, the Trust works collaboratively with staff and developers from the earliest stages of projects. Mr. Cook noted that the Trust benefits from members with extensive experience in development, design, construction, and planning.

Looking ahead, Mr. Cook stated that he expects the City to see a proposal for new affordable family housing in the near future. He also discussed the possibility of incorporating affordable housing into future projects, including the new Senior Center and a potential library expansion. He expressed interest in developing a stronger relationship with a commercial real estate broker to assist the Trust in identifying additional opportunities. Mr. Cook also described the Trust's efforts to preserve existing affordable housing through partnerships with organizations such as Metro West Collaborative Development. He referenced work involving Saint Joseph Hall, including elevator improvements, and ongoing collaboration regarding a Belmont Street property with stormwater concerns. He also discussed the use of HOME funds and the Trust's assistance to the Watertown Housing Authority in identifying opportunities to utilize ARPA funding.

Mr. Cook stated that the Trust is well represented by members with diverse professional

backgrounds and believes the group works effectively together. He expressed that he has greatly enjoyed serving on the Trust.

Action Item

Councilor Izzo made the following motion –

The Committee on Human Services recommends that the City Council approve the reappointment of Cliff Cook as a member of the Watertown Affordable Housing Trust to a term expiring June 30, 2029.

Councilor Bays seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

James O'Connor Interview

Mr. O'Connor stated that serving on the Council on Aging has been a rewarding experience. He described the Council as a dedicated group with members from a variety of backgrounds who take their responsibilities seriously and are committed to planning for the future needs of Watertown's older adult population. Mr. O'Connor said he hopes the City will establish a clear direction regarding the future of the Senior Center, whether through a new facility or renovations to the existing space. He noted that parking remains an important concern and expressed his desire to see progress toward addressing those challenges. Long term, he believes it would be beneficial for the Council to have a permanent facility that better serves the community. Mr. O'Connor also discussed expanding programming to attract younger seniors and praised Director of Senior Services, Lydia McCoy, for significantly increasing and diversifying programming. He expressed interest in offering additional outdoor activities as well as expanding in-house programming opportunities.

Action Item

Councilor Izzo made the following motion –

The Committee on Human Services recommends that the City Council approve the reappointment of James O'Connor as a member of the Council on Aging to a term expiring May 15, 2029.

Councilor Bays seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

Helen Oliver Interview

Ms. Oliver identified the Watertown Affordable Housing Trust's policy work over the past several years as one of its greatest accomplishments. She highlighted the completion of the Watertown Housing Plan and policy updates, noting that the current membership worked collaboratively to develop and refine those documents. She stated that she particularly enjoys participating in policy discussions and helping shape the Trust's long-term direction.

Looking ahead, Ms. Oliver expressed enthusiasm about the opportunities created by changing real estate conditions and the Trust's ability to support future affordable housing developments. She noted that the Trust was pleased to provide financial support for the Willow Park project and hopes to continue building on that momentum as additional housing proposals move forward. When asked whether the Trust has any gaps in

expertise, Ms. Oliver stated that the membership is exceptionally well qualified and includes professionals with a broad range of knowledge and experience. She also discussed the importance of preserving existing affordable housing and suggested that additional local funding sources, including Community Preservation Committee predevelopment funding, could strengthen future affordable housing initiatives.

Action Item

Councilor Izzo made the following motion

The Committee on Human Services recommends that the City Council approve the reappointment of Helen Oliver as a member of the Watertown Affordable Housing Trust to a term expiring June 30, 2029.

Councilor Bays seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

Councilor Bays made a motion to adjourn which was seconded by Councilor Izzo and passed 3-0. The meeting ended at approximately 6:30 PM. The minutes were written by Councilor Izzo.