Town of Watertown Housing Partnership

Administration Building
149 Main Street
Watertown, MA 02472
Phone: 617 972 6417
Fax: 617 972 6484
www.watertown-ma.gov

Minutes of Watertown Housing Partnership Meeting
November 17, 2020 6 PM, Virtual Meeting by Zoom and WCA-TV

Members in Attendance
Fred Reynolds (Chair), Cliff Cook, David Leon, Helen Oliver, Michael Lara, Torey Dean.
Non-members present: Larry Field (staff), Jennifer Van Campen, Mark Kraczkiewicz, Steve Collins.

I. Review of Draft Minutes

Minutes of October 20, 2020 were reviewed and approved unanimously.

II. Housing Plan

Fred introduced discussion of the draft housing plan and asked Larry to briefly describe changes since the last meeting. Larry said there have been many small revisions in the data and many language tweaks, and would focus on how four larger themes have evolved. First, while the WHP has previously discussed a 10% affordable housing goal as In Chapter 40B, this draft proposes a different metric to measure progress. The draft proposes that 15% of new housing created in the next 5 years come with a long-term affordability restriction (Chapter 40B is 10% of all housing). This would not be a requirement, but an aspiration. It would not necessitate a change in the inclusionary zoning ordinance but would mean trying to create 1 or 2 affordable developments like St. Joseph's Hall. Second, this draft expands on why a municipal affordable housing trust would be a useful tool. Over 100 municipalities in the state have such trusts. In addition to providing seed money for projects in the pre-development stage, the trust could provide its expertise and some funding as leverage to obtain federal and state support. Third, while deeper affordability has long been a focus, this draft is more explicit about seeking federal and state funding for projects that would serve households under 60% of area median income. Fourth, there is a strong focus on community engagement, starting with a community conversation about this plan at a public hearing.

There was discussion about how the proposed 15% of new housing metric fits into the six goals and strategies. Cliff noted that the metric is described as "overarching" but only applies to one or two. WHP members agreed that an introduction to the goals and strategies section should knit the six goals together and that the new housing production metric should be moved to the beginning of Goal 1. Two other changes were proposed by Cliff and accepted by other members: leveraging public funds should be a "near term" and not an "ongoing" action (Strategy 4B) and making clear that emergency critical repairs needed by affordable rental developments (not just homeowners) could be funded (Strategy 5C).

David said that after listening to the recorded Human Services Sub-Committee meeting he would like the draft to be clearer that its focus is affordable housing and suggested (with others concurring) that the language be tweaked in several places to achieve that. David also thought that four strategies (2C, 4B, 4C, and 6C) should be consolidated into other strategies. Other WHP members wanted to keep the strategies but agreed that Strategy 4C should focus more on affordability and that Strategy 6C should have more on marketing practices.

WHP members agreed that, with the changes discussed, the draft was ready for public hearing on December 3. The WHP agreed that the session would be 1 ½ hours and would be structured as follows: opening by chair, presentation by the Community Development & Planning Department, questions and comments by the public (with CD&P responding as needed) and then any additional comments by WHP members. The draft plan would be publicly posted before the hearing and provided to Council members.

III. **Emergency rental assistance program**

Jennifer reported on the emergency rental assistance program. So far, 36 households have been accepted into the program, and 3 are in process. Based on the enrolled households to date, Metro West Collaborative estimates that $119,000 will be disbursed (including administrative costs). Metro West projects that the program can support up to 15 additional households, including the households still in process.

Larry reported that he and Jennifer had a conference call with lawyers with Metro West Legal Services and the Boston College Legal Clinic (both represent Watertown residents) about what they are seeing in the eviction pipeline and about the availability of the emergency rental assistance program. The lawyers said they have not seen a surge in eviction proceedings yet. Larry also reported that the program flyer was mailed to over 100 smaller rental property owners.

There was discussion about future needs for rental assistance. Jennifer said there have been 1 or 2 applications per week over the last month, but it is hard to know whether the rate will stay the same or increase. She also noted that December is the last month of assistance for the households who first started receiving assistance in October. Based on the experience in Newton, most of these households will still need the assistance in January. Mark Kraczkiewicz asked if we knew what proportion of the households in the RAFT pipeline (estimated at 20,000 by the Boston Globe in early November) were Watertown residents; Jennifer said no. Michael said there were still a few households at the Housing Authority who needed help.

Fred asked that the next agenda include discussion of a possible second round of emergency rental assistance. In further discussion, WHP members indicated general support for assistance to households eligible for the first round (including new applicants) and for making the program available for WHA tenants and those receiving other forms of public rental assistance. Based on Newton's experience, Jennifer believes expanding eligibility will lead to only a few additional applicants.

IV. **385 and 405 Pleasant Street (The Aver) affordable units**

Steve Collins from Glenshane Properties joined the meeting near the end to discuss The Aver's plan to convert its second phase from rental to condo units. So far, 28 units have been substantially completed (temporary certificate of occupancy), including 5 affordable rental units that have been occupied. The second phase, under construction, is 385 and 405 Pleasant Street. The owner is converting the units from rental to ownership because of market conditions.

There will be no change to the buildings and the 3 affordable units will be in the same locations. Answering questions from Cliff and David, Steve confirmed that the affordable units will have the same finishes as the market rate units and be offered the same amenities (in this instance, there are no amenities like gym space).

Michael moved to accept the affordable units, converted from rental to ownership, and Cliff seconded the motion. It was unanimously adopted.

Fred asked that staff provide a brief report on this project at the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 7:26 pm.