



TOWN OF WATERTOWN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

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Minutes of Watertown Housing Partnership Meeting December 15, 2020 6 PM, Virtual Meeting by Zoom and WCA-TV

Members in Attendance

Fred Reynolds (Chair), Cliff Cook, David Leon, Helen Oliver, Michael Lara.

Non-members present: Steve Magoon and Larry Field (staff), Jennifer Van Campen, and Mark Krackiewicz.

I. Review of Draft Minutes

Minutes of November 17 and December 3, 2020 were reviewed and approved unanimously.

II. Housing Plan

Fred asked Larry to provide an update on the draft housing plan. Larry said there is some non-substantive work needed to deliver a final product: 1) Laurel Schwab is formatting and putting visuals into the text, 2) the text is being cleaned up, and 3) the U.S. Census Bureau ACS 2015-2019 data that arrived last week is being substituted for the older data. Larry suggested that if the members are comfortable with letting staff do this non-substantive work, that the plan is ready for a vote tonight.

Larry added that David had proposed one small but substantive change that should be discussed. David explained his proposal that the wording of Strategy 3C be changed to add "flexible" housing opportunities for seniors and members agreed.

WHP members agreed that the draft plan should be brought to a vote. David moved to adopt the draft plan, with the understanding that staff would make the non-substantive changes described, and Cliff seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously adopted.

III. Emergency rental assistance program

Larry summarized parts of the 12/9/20 written report on the emergency rental assistance program. So far, 44 households have been accepted into the program; 17 first received assistance in October and December will be their last month. There is capacity to help around 10 more households with the present funding. If we just continued with the current program, the \$175,000 would run out in April.

Staff ran numerous scenarios for a second round. The scenarios vary as to whether households receive more than 3 months assistance (and how much longer), whether new applicants are accepted, and by levels of demand. Given the scarce affordable housing resources that the WHP controls, staff also considered other state or local resources. The state's RAFT and ERMA programs offer assistance for eligible households (RAFT up to 50% Area Median Income or AMI, ERMA between 50 and 80% AMI). However, there is significant documentation required and a

lengthy delay (earlier in the fall, estimated at 2-3 months). CPA funds are potentially available once the application round is opened in winter or spring 2021, if there is a compelling need and a strong, well-supported application is submitted to the CPC.

Staff is presenting three options to the WHP, with Option 3 recommended. All three would commit \$100,000. The CDBG program income account has \$136,000 left and staff recommends a reserve because this money is our most flexible affordable housing resource. Option 2 focuses only on new applicants, while option 4 only on extending those in the current pipeline (44 enrollees plus those in process) so they receive a full 6 months. Option 3 would extend current enrollees for 2 months and accept additional applicants until funds are exhausted. Steve added that we recommend Option 3 because it strikes a balance between those in need since the summer and those who are now in need. It also potentially helps households while they wait for RAFT/ERMA applications to be processed.

There was an extensive discussion about the assumptions underlying the options, other funding sources, and variants on Option 3. The major points included the following:

- Based on experience in Newton and elsewhere, the scenarios assumed 90% of enrollees would extend. Jennifer said applicants have been encouraged to apply for RAFT/ERMA but we do not know how many of the enrollees have done so.
- Jennifer described the streamlined recertification process used in Newton and said the administrative fee would be \$50/household.
- While 18 households are technically in process, many have been incomplete for a long time and may never provide enough information. Metro West has been receiving 1-2 applications per week.
- If the program is opened to WHA tenants, 5 households have been identified as likely eligible with around \$15,000 needed. When Newton opened its program to households with other forms of public rental assistance, very few applied.
- There was strong interest in providing applicants with an incentive to apply for RAFT/ERMA while not establishing an unrealistic requirement. Helen suggested requiring that extended households apply for RAFT/ERMA in order to obtain the last month of continued assistance. Members thought this condition was reasonable.
- The numbers suggest that \$100,000 might not meet the needs of current enrollees plus new applicants if the COVID economic crisis continues. If the \$100,000 is insufficient, the WHP can look at other resources. In any event, the further funding will provide immediate help and serves as a bridge to future alternatives for the affected households.

Cliff moved to commit \$100,000 of CDBG program income to emergency rental assistance, under the same terms as the current program, except that 1) extensions for up to 3 months would be allowed, with the 3rd month contingent on a RAFT/ERMA application and 2) households receiving public rental assistance may now apply. David seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Update on affordable units under construction

Larry reported on four projects on track to deliver affordable units in 2021: Arsenal Yards (30 rental units at or below 80% AMI, 15 at or below 65% AMI), Aver (4 rental at or below 80%, 1 at

or below 65% and are seeking to convert 3 rental to ownership), Watermills (10 rental at or below 80%, 5 at or below 65%), and 101 N. Beacon Street (4 condos at or below 80% AMI). Two approved projects have not advanced (33 Mt Auburn, with 2 condo units at or below 80% AMI and 166 Main Street, 3 rental at or below 80% AMI and 2 at or below 65%). Both special permits are secure because of the Governor's emergency order in March, which tolled the running of time on such permits.

V. Other business

Mike described the new centralized wait list system used for public housing. Applicants can now apply for housing at any public housing authority in the state by checking a box online. As an example, the non-emergency wait list for families has jumped from 2,784 to over 11,000. The wait list is so long that housing authorities around the state are essentially taking only emergency applicants.

Meeting adjourned at 7:27pm.