



TOWN OF WATERTOWN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

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Minutes of Watertown Housing Partnership Meeting February 26, 2021 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: Steve Magoon and Larry Field (staff), Mark Krackiewicz, and member of the public.

I. Review of Draft Minutes

Minutes of January 19, 2021 were reviewed and approved unanimously.

II. HOME Annual Action Plan

HUD requires each HOME recipient community to produce an annual action plan for its HOME activities and Watertown participates with the other WestMetro communities in issuing a combined plan. Larry reviewed the schedule: the Town submits a draft now to the WestMetro Collaborative and the combined draft is presented at an April 5 hearing in Newton. After the 30-day comment period, the plan is submitted to HUD by May 14. Fred asked members for comments on staff's draft plan; there were two brief comments indicating that the draft is consistent with the Town's likely activities in the next year. The draft was approved unanimously.

III. WestMetro HOME Consortium Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing

HUD requires each HOME recipient community to produce an analysis of impediments to fair housing every five years. Larry reviewed the plan's status. The WestMetro HOME Consortium drafted one, with Watertown's participation, for the 2021-25 period. The plan was provisionally finalized in late November and the 30-day public comment period expired in January. WestMetro's consultant, Judi Barrett, is now making small tweaks to reflect those comments. Watertown does not need to approve the plan but the WHP could endorse it.

The 2015-19 plan was only partially implemented, Larry said, because too many recommendations were delegated to individual communities and there was insufficient capacity to achieve the goals. The new plan makes the WestMetro Consortium the implementing party for most recommendations. Newton staff, combined with staff from the other 12 communities, should have the ability to make substantial progress. Larry said the recommendations are in the following areas: public education, discrimination in the private market, fair housing process, and policy changes. As to policy changes, the recommendations were worded so that a community that has already created multifamily zoning districts and/or allows two-families is not necessarily expected to take further steps in that area.

Members discussed whether they were ready to consider endorsing the plan. Since there was a consensus that more review is required, this item will be on next month's agenda.

IV. Updates on pending matters

a. Emergency rental assistance program

Larry summarized the emergency rental assistance program's status. The state funds awarded to the Watertown Community Foundation are currently covering the assistance, but those funds will shortly be exhausted, and we will return to using Town funds in March. There are 54 enrolled households and 20 Housing Authority households that are being considered for the program. We will have better information in the next few weeks as to how long the committed resources will last. Cliff asked whether the rents for WHA households have been lowered because of their COVID loss and Michael said adjustments have already been made. Nevertheless, the need for rental assistance for WHA households is up to four times more than what was projected in the fall.

b. Housing Plan

The Housing Plan was referred to the Council's Committees on Economic Development & Planning and on Human Services. Two joint meetings have been scheduled, for February 24 and March 5. Steve and Larry will present the plan to the committee members and answer questions. Larry will circulate the meeting notices to WHP members. Cliff asked if staff has received any informal feedback and many public comments are expected. Steve said Council members have not provided any feedback yet. He does not expect an unusual level of public comment.

c. Municipal affordable housing trust

Since the February 24 committee meeting will now focus on the Housing Plan as a whole, extensive discussion of a municipal affordable housing trust will occur later.

d. Local preference

Larry reported that he and Cliff have gotten partial data from SEB Housing on seven Watertown projects and requested similar data from Metro West Collaborative on one project. He said there should be data to share at the next meeting.

VI. Other business

There was no other business.

Meeting adjourned at 6:55 pm.