



TOWN OF WATERTOWN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

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Minutes of Watertown Housing Partnership Meeting March 16, 2021 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: Larry Field (staff), Jennifer Van Campen, and Jackie Dobson.

I. Review of Draft Minutes

Minutes of February 16, 2021 were reviewed and approved unanimously.

II. 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. Since Watertown is part of the WestMetro Consortium, it files the document on behalf of member communities. No formal approval by Watertown is necessary.

Members discussed the report's recommendations on creating multifamily zoning districts and/or allowing more two-family structures. Larry noted that the document was written to apply to all 13 communities and that it was recognized that some communities, like Watertown, have already established multifamily zoning districts and/or have two-family/two-family conversion districts. Members concluded that no action on the report was necessary.

III. Updates on pending matters

The updates were moved up on the agenda.

a. Housing Plan

The Housing Plan was approved by the Council's Committees on Economic Development & Planning and on Human Services February 24 and sent to the full Council. Larry said the Housing Plan is likely to be on the March 23 Council agenda.

b. Municipal affordable housing trust

The Economic Development & Planning and Human Services Committees expect to continue working jointly on implementing the Housing Plan and said that creation of a municipal affordable housing trust will be the first strategy considered. The committees reserved April 12 to start that discussion.

c. Local preference

Larry reported that he and Cliff have collected data from SEB Housing and Metro West Collaborative on nine Watertown rental projects and one ownership project. While lottery data has also been collected from other communities, there may be more that can be acquired. Cliff noted that while there will be useful information to share next meeting, it is not clear that the data will be robust enough to draw definitive conclusions.

IV. Emergency rental assistance program

Jennifer summarized the emergency rental assistance program's status. There are 55 households, plus the 20 Housing Authority households, that have enrolled in the program. All authorized funds, from both the CDBG program income and the Community Foundation/state grant, have been disbursed or reserved for enrolled households. Since Metro West reserves for the maximum amount of time a household is eligible, this is likely to be more money than will be used for those households. As discussed below, some households drop out early.

As Jennifer explained, 9 of the 17 households in the first cohort (first received assistance in September, March is the last month currently authorized) applied for RAFT and were eligible for the full 6 months. In the second cohort (October, April) 4 of the 20 applied for RAFT. Based on experience with the first cohort—and experience in other communities—more second cohort households will apply for RAFT in the next few weeks. Jennifer said that a few of the 8 first cohort households are out of the program because they no longer need help or moved out of Watertown. However, money is being reserved for the remainder, since they can be assisted if they show, within a reasonable time, that they have applied for RAFT.

Unless more money becomes available, the program is not accepting new applications and will not be able to assist the first cohort beyond their sixth month. There are also two eligible households ready to enter the program.

Larry reported that federal COVID relief money for rental assistance is going to states, and to cities with a population at/above 200,000. Sources say the state intends to use most, perhaps virtually all, to support its Eviction Diversion initiative (including RAFT). It is likely that some money will go to community foundations, and the Watertown Community Foundation will actively seek such money. It is also possible that the state will direct some money to support municipal rental assistance programs.

Because of the possibility that more outside money will be available this spring, Larry said the Department's recommendation is to commit some new money to cover enrolled households whose 6-month period is expiring. Since the CDBG program income account is almost depleted some money should remain in the account to pay for CDBG program expenses.

Members discussed whether to commit additional money, and how much to commit. There was a consensus that the WHP should authorize use of additional money from CDBG program income. Since the Department does not yet have a specific figure for how much money must be reserved, Cliff moved to authorize Steve Magoon to apply up to \$20,000 from the CDBG account. The motion was unanimously adopted.

VI. Other business

There was no other business.

Meeting adjourned at 7:02 pm.