



# TOWN OF WATERTOWN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

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## Minutes of Watertown Housing Partnership Meeting April 20, 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). Because of technical difficulties with Fred's computer, he attended but asked David to act as chair.

### **I. Review of Draft Minutes**

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

### **II. Local preference**

Larry made a presentation [will link when posted] on data relating to local preference he and Cliff collected. Preliminary findings included the following:

- while 40% of Town residents who enter lotteries for Watertown rental units eventually lease an affordable unit, local preference would increase this percentage;
- about half of local applicants for rental units are minority, so DHCD "minority" balancing would not be needed;
- "open" pools for Watertown rental units are likely to have a higher % of minority than "local" pools, but blending the two narrows the gap;
- the likely mix of minority groups in the local pool is a concern because Watertown has a lower % of African Americans than surrounding communities;
- while minority participation in ownership lotteries is also high, a much lower % of minority applicants were able to buy and this is a concern without further data that offers a benign reason for that outcome.

Cliff noted that it is not surprising that the % of minorities buying affordable units would be lower than their % of applicants given national data on wealth formation. He also observed that avoiding "disparate impact" is a minimum standard and that Watertown and Belmont stand out in the communities around Boston for their low % of African-Americans. Several members suggested they could support local preference for 50% of the units in rental lotteries to balance the interest in supporting residents with promoting fair housing in the region.

Helen said that with the market tending more toward ownership now, it might not make sense to change our policy on rental units without addressing the ownership side. David suggested that Larry and Cliff could look for more data on ownership lotteries. Fred suggested that there may be ways to improve the ability of minority applicants to buy affordable units and lessen our concern about using local preference for ownership lotteries. With members inclined to a comprehensive recommendation, there was agreement to continue the discussion.

**III. Emergency rental assistance program**

Larry summarized the emergency rental assistance program's status. There are 58 households, plus the 20 Housing Authority households, that have enrolled in the program. The Watertown Community Foundation pledged an additional \$45,000 it will receive from state funds. With this new money and the % of enrolled households applying for RAFT and therefore eligible to continue receiving Watertown assistance, Metro West Collaborative was able to enroll 3 new households since the last meeting. New applications are slow. Larry also noted that the state announced on April 2 that federal money would support its Eviction Diversion Initiative, so we are not expecting money to flow directly to the Town for rental assistance.

**IV. Updates on pending matters**

**a. Municipal affordable housing trust**

The Economic Development & Planning and Human Services Committees approved a draft of the declaration of trust for review by KP Law as Town Counsel. Staff was asked to draft an ordinance as well for Counsel's review.

**b. Nexus study**

The joint committees also asked staff to prepare a memo describing a nexus study to evaluate a possible "linkage" fee for new commercial development that would fund affordable housing.

**V. Overview of Proposed Short-Term Rental Regulations**

Larry reported on proposed short-term rental regulations being considered by the Council's Ordinance Committee. The Town had last considered such regulations in fall 2019. On March 31, staff presented proposed zoning language and guidelines to the committee. The proposal differentiates between short-term rentals offered as a "limited share" unit, a "home share" unit or an "owner-adjacent" unit. A limited share is renting a bedroom or other space within a primary residence, with the resident living there; home share is renting an entire unit, which is the primary residence, but that resident is not living there while rented; and owner-adjacent is a small multi-family where the owner lives in one unit and is renting out another unit in the building on a short-term basis. In the latter case, the owner can only do short-term rental on two units (his/her own, as a home share, and one owner-adjacent). The resident/owner must register with the Town and the State.

David suggested it might be better to place a fixed cap on the number of guests, rather than using the formulation as proposed (X bedrooms or Y guests, whichever is lesser). He expressed concern about whether short-term rentals take away housing supply and might have a negative impact on neighbors. Cliff agreed that there are concerns but thought most rentals will occur in larger buildings and not in single family/two-family neighborhoods. Fred also had concerns about short-term rentals.

**VI. Other business**

There was no other business.

Meeting adjourned at 7:22 pm.