



# 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](http://www.watertown-ma.gov)

## Minutes of Watertown Housing Partnership Meeting September 15, 2020 5:30 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, Elodia Thomas, Councilors Caroline Bays and Anthony Palomba.

At 5:30 PM, Chair Fred Reynolds noted that there would likely not be a quorum until 6 PM and proposed that those present have an informal discussion of the Housing Plan and formally open the meeting at a later time. Those present were willing to proceed informally.

There was informal discussion for approximately 30 minutes about the proposed redraft of the Housing Plan's Goals and Strategies section. The redraft, based on discussion at the July 28 meeting, consists of a bulleted list of goals and strategies. Under goal 1, Fred made comments about his strong interest in forming a housing trust and finding additional resources for rental assistance (e.g., through the minimum 10% allocated for housing under the Community Preservation Act). Larry Field noted that the 2014 Housing Production Plan had an "Implementation Plan" that identified the timeline for each strategy and said that would be a way to identify priorities amongst the many strategies. Cliff Cook suggested that "rental assistance" as a housing strategy would better fit under a different goal. Michael Lara noted that the strategy relating to public housing (Goal 2, strategy b) should include discussion of accommodating tenants with special needs. Fred said that Goal 5 (strategies b and c) should be clear that the WHP is proposing to "continue" its preservation strategies. Cliff said he would like linkage payments by commercial developers (Goal 4, strategy e) to be a high priority/short-term item. Larry said he would take the various comments made and propose further revisions.

At 6 PM, the Chair called the meeting to order.

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

Minutes of July 28, 2020 were reviewed and approved unanimously.

### **II. Emergency rental assistance program**

Jennifer Van Campen reported on the emergency rental assistance program, which was opened September 3. So far, 21 households have applied. Of those, 10 are of color, 9 are non-Hispanic White and 2 did not report. There is a bedroom mix so far that leans toward 1-BR and 2-BR units. 13 of the 21 households do not have any children. Later in the meeting, Jennifer said that there have been 66 inquiries and that roughly half of inquiries eventually turn into applications; she expects more inquiries and applications as we head toward the September 24 deadline.

There was discussion about doing more outreach through the school system and it was agreed that staff would request the district send out a separate email about the deadline. There was also discussion about pushing back the deadline but it was agreed to make no change.

Tony Palomba asked whether the WHP was considering a second round of emergency rental assistance. Fred said the WHP has not voted on a second round but, since it is likely COVID-19 will continue to make it difficult for some renters, the Town will need to think about further funding. There was discussion of potential local and state/federal funding sources.

Michael said there are public housing households that should be eligible for any Watertown emergency rental assistance program because their incomes have fallen due to COVID. He understood that there would be no change in the present round, but would like public housing tenants to be eligible in any future round. Members agreed that this issue could be revisited before any future funding round.

### **III. Housing Plan**

Fred said the Housing Needs section draft was a good start and identified several changes he recommended: defining specialized terms and minimizing use of acronyms; clarifying the first sentence; and updating the unit type data with the new rental units produced along the Arsenal and Pleasant Street corridors. Cliff suggested a glossary of terms and said he would send some specific comments about the demographic data. Members agreed that further edits would be proposed via emails to Larry and that he would incorporate those in the next draft.

Fred and Larry said they had discussed the schedule for completing the plan. Larry said he could provide the following for the October meeting: a revised draft of the Goals/Strategies and Housing Needs sections, and drafts of Development Regulations/Trends/Constraints, Watertown Comprehensive Plan and Implementation Plan sections. He could then incorporate edits of those sections and draft the Executive Summary and attachments by the November meeting. Depending on feedback from WHP members, the plan could be finalized at the November or December meeting. Members of the Council's Human Services Subcommittee and the Community Preservation Committee present at the meeting requested that drafts be provided in advance and the WHP agreed to do that.

### **IV. Other Business**

Larry reported that the WestMetro Consortium was now suggesting that the September 22 briefing/discussion on Analysis of Fair Housing Impediments should be posted as a public meeting in each of the 13 participating communities. Members agreed to posting it as a WHP meeting.

Cliff asked if there were projects in the pipeline. Larry said we are continuing to see lab/office developments but no significant residential projects.

Michael said the Housing Authority was moving ahead on a proposal to "reposition" 50 units of federal public housing to project-based vouchers. He said that a 2-page summary of this proposal would be available soon. Members agreed to put this on the October agenda (in addition to the Housing Plan and the Emergency rental Assistance Program).

Meeting adjourned at 6:59 pm.