



# TOWN OF WATERTOWN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

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## Minutes of Watertown Housing Partnership Special Meeting December 3, 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), Caroline Bays, John Bockian, Jackie Dobson, Brian Dota, Lisa Feltner, Mark Krackiewicz, and Anthony Palomba.

### **I. Introduction**

Fred, as Chair, opened the special meeting and explained the agenda. The purpose of this meeting is to obtain public comment on the [Draft Watertown Housing Plan](#). Staff will present the draft plan and then the meeting will be opened to public questions and/or comment. The meeting will close with comments, if any, from WHP members.

### **II. Housing Plan Presentation**

Larry used a series of PowerPoint slides to make a [Staff presentation](#) on the draft housing plan. The slides were posted earlier on December 3 via a link on the meeting agenda.

### **III. Public questions and comments**

John Bockian asked whether the proposed target (15% of new housing during 2021-25) could become a “ceiling” rather than a “floor.” Larry said that was a potential downside and that the WHP could consider that point when it voted on the plan. Later in the meeting, there was further discussion of this 15% target, including the following;

- John asked for clarification as to what units would be included in the target; Larry said all units with long-term affordability restrictions would be counted, including any over 80% of area median income.
- Lisa Feltner felt the target should be higher and both Tony Palomba and Caroline Bays agreed that more than 15% should be considered. Larry noted that 15% was chosen as a “stretch” and that it would be very difficult to get significantly above that percentage. Fred noted that there would be nothing preventing Watertown from achieving more than 15%.

Tony commented positively about the draft plan, including the creation of a municipal affordable housing trust (Strategy 1A) and considering accessory dwelling units (Strategy 4A). He asked for further explanation of Strategy 1F (linkage fee) and why it was listed as Long-Term. Larry discussed what would be involved in considering a fee for commercial development that triggered housing demand and why it could take 3-5 years to do the necessary study and evaluate such a proposal. Tony also suggested the plan define the time horizons for the various strategies (Near-Term, etc). Later in the meeting Tony asked about other strategies:

- Tony asked about Strategy 1B (considering changes in the inclusionary zoning requirement). Steve said that it would be sensible to consider the Town's options but that no specific proposal was being recommended in the draft plan. Tony said even an increase from 15% to 17% for the larger developments would be good.
- Tony asked what zoning changes were covered by Strategy 4C. Steve said this strategy was intentionally broad and could include parking requirements, accessory dwelling units, and many other provisions.

Caroline commented positively about the draft plan. She asked why purchase of individual single family homes was not included as a strategy; Larry referred to the high cost of such purchases and the likelihood that only Watertown funds would be available. Caroline also asked why a home rule petition to allow a real estate transfer fee was not included as a strategy. Larry said there was no WHP discussion on this but an implicit assumption that state level solutions, such as zoning reform that reduced long term regional housing demand and various real estate transfer fee proposals, were outside the scope of the housing plan.

Mark Krackiewicz asked about the possibility that COVID-19 would lead developers to focus more on condos, reduce the creation of rental units through inclusionary zoning and put renters in more distress.

Lisa said she did not see much new in the draft plan and thought there should be more urgency in creating affordable housing. Steve listed a number of new elements in the draft plan, including the 15% target, and the focus on using new affordable housing resources.

#### IV. **WHP Concluding Remarks**

The meeting closed with comments from Fred and Cliff, emphasizing the value of having a municipal affordable housing trust to provide seed money and respond quickly to opportunities, and Michael about the potential role of the Housing Authority in providing new affordable housing and meeting needs of individuals with a disability.

Meeting adjourned at 7:30 pm.