



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

Minutes of Watertown Housing Partnership Meeting July 28, 2020 4:30 PM, Virtual Meeting by Zoom and WCA-TV

Members In Attendance

Fred Reynolds (Chair), Cliff Cook, David Leon, Helen Oliver, Torey Dean, Michael Lara.

Non-members present: Steve Magoon, Larry Field (staff), Jennifer VanCampen, Elodia Thomas, Mark Krackiewicz.

Chair Fred Reynolds called the meeting to order. Steve Magoon introduced Larry Field, who started as a senior planner with Watertown last week and will provide staff support for the Housing Partnership. Larry said he had previously worked for the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance, the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development and the Department of Housing and Community Development. The Chair and members welcomed him.

I. Review of Draft Minutes

Minutes of June 16, 2020 were reviewed and approved unanimously.

II. Emergency rental assistance for Public Housing Families

Michael Lara 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. There was discussion concerning why this issue could not be addressed by adjusting their rents, since rents are pegged to 30% of household income. Mike said it was not as easy as adjusting the rents, partly because tenants may be delayed in completing the necessary paperwork and partly because of delays in making the adjustments. Recently, Mike said, he has become less concerned about the eligibility of public housing families because the Community Resilience Fund has offered to assist the approximately eight households now in arrears because of COVID. He would be comfortable in waiting to see if the Fund is able to meet all the needs. Given this apparent resolution, no motion was offered.

III. MetroWest Report on WHP Rental Assistance Program.

Jennifer VanCampen said she would be happy to update the committee on the programs MetroWest has been administering in other communities, but that Watertown has not approved a rental assistance program yet or decided who will administer it. Steve explained that the Council's Human Services Committee endorsed the program but has not yet issued minutes and reported this motion to the full council for action. Steve expects that it will be before the Council at its August 11 meeting.

Jennifer said that MetroWest is administering a similar program in three communities. Newton's program is the only one that has been operating so far. Her observations from Newton are that: 1) applicants have very low incomes, often close to zero; 2) their rents are lower than expected, given their limited incomes, and therefore the average payment per household has been lower

than expected; 3) many leases end August 31 and it is not clear what will happen; and 4) it has proven difficult for applicants to complete their paperwork.

IV. Five-year HOME Consolidated Plan (FY2021-2025)

The five-year HOME Consolidated Plan was filed by the WestMetro Consortium, Larry said. He said there would be no surprises in the Plan for WHP members, who have been working on affordable housing issues. Given the remaining item on the agenda and the compressed schedule, Larry offered to email the plan to members rather than summarize it at the meeting. The Chair and members accepted this offer.

V. Status of Housing Production Plan Update

Fred started by reminding the committee that before COVID hit in March, it was in position to get feedback from stakeholders on the draft goals and strategies for affordable housing production. He invited members and staff to provide their comments on the draft. Cliff suggested that the word “evaluate” replace “consider” in connection with the recommended strategies. Other members were comfortable with this change.

Larry started by noting that the GLAM decision allows flexibility in both goals/strategies and the scope/content of the plan. The purpose of a housing production plan would not be to qualify for “safe harbor” under Chapter 40B but to provide an internal blueprint and to send a message to the wider community as to Watertown’s commitment to affordable housing. The WHP has recognized this in prior discussions and there was even a suggestion that the proposed document be called a “Housing Plan” to differentiate it from what is required under DHCD guidelines. Watertown would not need to submit the plan for DHCD approval. There was discussion of whether DHCD would accept and review a Housing Production Plan from Watertown and, if so, whether there would be value in a submission even if not necessary under DHCD guidelines. Staff indicated that this could be investigated further but that there was more value in focusing on plan implementation than producing a document that would be ready for DHCD review. Larry said that while the goals/strategies section was finalized, staff could continue to work on the other sections presently in draft form.

Staff agreed that the proposed goals/strategies were sound and were logical extensions of the 2014 Housing Production Plan. After discussion of specific comments, it was agreed that staff would propose a redline version with wording changes for Goal 4 and several listed strategies to be reviewed at the next meeting.

VI. Other Business

Cliff asked if there were projects in the pipeline. Steve said there were a couple of lab developments but no significant residential projects. Elodia Thomas asked if minutes could be posted more promptly and that documents under discussion be made available to interested parties. Fred said the posting of minutes is always a month behind because they require WHP approval. Staff said that approved minutes for February and June would be posted very soon and that documents could be shared via ZOOM in the future in the same way that hard copies were generally distributed during past meetings.

Members agreed that the August meeting would be held only if needed.

Meeting adjourned at 5:33 pm.