



TOWN OF WATERTOWN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

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Minutes of Watertown Housing Partnership Meeting October 19, 2021 6 PM, Remote Participation Only

Members in Attendance

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

Non-members present: Larry Field (staff), Mark Krackiewicz, Jennifer Van Campen, Joe De Larauze, Sophia Suarez-Friedman, and Carsten Snow-Eikelberg.

I. Review of Draft Minutes

Minutes of September 21, 2021 were reviewed and approved unanimously.

II. St. Joseph's Hall—funding for elevator replacement

Fred asked members if they had questions or comments about the proposed use of HOME funds to replace the elevator serving St. Joseph's Hall/2 Rosary Drive, an affordable housing development owned by Metro West Collaborative. David asked Metro West to explain whether and how funds would be returned if the state was able to inspect the finished project more promptly than expected, lowering the relocation costs. Jennifer said that it could be pro rata, or (possibly) the WestMetro Consortium would allow the other funders (the Town and MHIC) to recover first. Mark asked if HOME funds would be available to assist the proposed 1 Rosary Drive project if HOME funds were used for 2 Rosary Drive. Jennifer and Larry explained that the HOME funds were replenished every year, although Watertown's exclusive use funds are small (about \$90,000/year) and that the consolidated fund pool varies in competitiveness.

David moved and Cliff seconded that the FY22 WestMetro HOME Consortium Annual Action Plan be amended to authorize the allocation of \$145,897.85 of Watertown's FY19 HOME Program Income funds towards the necessary elevator replacement at St. Joseph's Hall/2 Rosary Drive, a senior affordable housing project, contingent on HUD approval of the project's request for "troubled project" status to allow further HOME funding.

III. 103 Nichols Ave

Mike made a brief presentation about the proposed 103 Nichols Avenue project. Mike said the Housing Authority bought the land in the 1980's for development but had not been able to put together a feasible project. The Authority now has a feasible proposal for special needs housing that requires up to \$1.5 million in Community Preservation Act (CPA) Funds. The project has been deemed eligible to file a full application on December 10.

The project would involve constructing a group home with 6-7 bedrooms. The Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS) has indicated a willingness to fund the operations for 15 years, with Beaverbrook as the operator. Mike said that the state is not willing to fund the needed capital improvements, so CPA funds are the only avenue available. Mike said that more design work would be done before the December 10 application.

Cliff said he was surprised that the state was not willing to fund any of the capital improvements because he has seen similar projects funded in other communities. Mike explained that a number of program waivers would have been necessary, including for site density and lack of elevator access to the second floor. Mike said the site is very tight and that the Authority expected to use the Dover Amendment to set aside the dimensional requirements that would otherwise apply. Cliff also asked what would happen at the end of 15 years. Mike said that renewal was assumed, but there was no guarantee that DDS would continue to fund operations. David, noting that the project met many of the Housing Plan goals, applauded the Authority for working with DDS and Beaverbrook to put the project together.

Cliff moved/Torey seconded that the WHP recommend CPA funding. The vote was unanimous (Mike recused himself). Fred asked Larry to draft a support letter.

IV. Updates on pending matters

a. Emergency rental assistance program

Larry reported that there have been 63 enrolled households over 13 months (not including 20 Housing Authority tenants). Most received 6 months of rental assistance. While it appeared that many had gotten state assistance through the RAFT program, Metro West did a survey indicating that 32 of the households say they still need assistance. This included households who applied to RAFT but never submitted the required documents. Of the 32, 8 have now applied or re-applied to RAFT and Metro West and the Wayside Youth Center will work further with these tenants on the applications. They will receive one month of assistance and a second month if they apply for RAFT. There is \$50,000 left (\$17,000 from the Community Foundation/state grants and \$33,000 from the Town's use of CDBG program income).

Jennifer said that the initial month rent for the 32 households will probably reduce the funds by half. It remains to be seen how many households will apply for RAFT, which would dictate how soon the remaining funds will be exhausted. In January 2022, the Community Foundation is getting a further state grant that can be used for rental assistance.

Since how to proceed in 2022 remains open, Larry, Jennifer and Jan Singer/Community Foundation have discussed the possible availability of federal ARPA funds directly allocated to Watertown. The Council referred recommendations on use of the ARPA funds to the Budget Oversight Committee. Larry noted the Committee is currently focusing on the next budget and has not officially started work on ARPA funds, which are available between now and 2024.

Members indicated the need to become more informed about the eligible uses of ARPA money and for a discussion about the WHP's priorities amongst those uses. Larry said state guidance on eligible uses just came out today and he would distribute that to the members. Helen moved to authorize Larry to work with the Community Foundation on a communication to the Budget Oversight Committee indicating interest in discussing use of ARPA funds for housing at an appropriate time. Mike seconded the motion. It was approved unanimously.

b. Municipal affordable housing trust

The Council unanimously voted on September 28 to proceed with a public hearing and vote on the [affordable housing trust document package](#). The hearing is likely to occur in late November.

c. Nexus Study

The Council also unanimously voted on September 28 to proceed with the [nexus study](#) (linkage between new commercial development and affordable housing demand). A draft request for written quotes from vendors is being finalized. The study is likely to be completed in mid-2022.

d. Local preference policy

The council committees began discussing the [local preference policy](#) on September 16 but tabled action; no further meeting has been scheduled yet.

V. Continued Discussion of Accessory Dwelling Units

Larry summarized the September discussion on a potential ADU ordinance: 1) it should be fairly liberal and simple to understand/administer, 2) should not differentiate between single- and two-family homes, and 3) should not require an extra parking space in every situation.

Larry provided feedback on those three points. It would make sense to have an ADU ordinance that allowed every single- and two-family home in designated zoning districts to build an ADU within the existing primary home or with an attached addition, as long as the ADU fit within the lot's dimensional requirements. He noted that many communities making the first step in allowing ADUs focused on "attached" units because they have minimal impact on the neighborhood. With respect to parking requirements, Larry said it would better to stick with one parking space/ADU. Parking was the most-cited reason for ending the Town's 1990s experiment with ADUs; in addition, it would be hard to come up with a way to differentiate between ADU locations that require parking and those that do not.

The Department also felt it would be important to address illegal units at the same time as proposing an ADU ordinance. There are at least 200 illegal units in the Town, but it is difficult to eliminate them. First, the Town relies on complaints to trigger inspections that uncover the illegal units; there have been only 71 instances in the last ten years where a violation has been found. Second, a court decision has eliminated the favored way to remedy the violation, i.e. removing the second kitchen. The court ruling said an owner is allowed to have a second kitchen. The Department invited ideas about an effective program to address illegal units.

Cliff said he continues to think that parking is a "red herring" and suggested a radius from high-frequency buses to identify where parking rules can be relaxed. Fred agreed with Cliff but noted the politics involved. There was renewed discussion about whether an ADU ordinance should differentiate between single- and two-family homes. Using site plan review was discussed, but several members thought it would unduly complicate and delay the approval process.

It was agreed that the Department would come back to the WHP in November with a draft ordinance "annotated" to indicate options where member seem split on how to proceed.

IV. Other business

There was no further business.

Meeting adjourned at 7:32 pm.