



CITY OF WATERTOWN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

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Minutes of Watertown Housing Partnership Meeting January 18 2022 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), Alisa Gardner-Todreas, Sandy Cooke, Liz Cremens, Tony Palomba

Although the meeting was scheduled for 6 PM, it started late due to technical problems.

I. Review of Draft Minutes

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

II. ARPA funding

Larry made a [presentation](#) on ARPA funding. The presentation focused on the amount directly available to Watertown (\$10.74M), eligible uses in the housing area, and what some nearby communities were committing to housing priorities.

Fred asked for discussion. Mike said it would be prudent for the WHP to make recommendations to the Council. He said the WHA would be interested in ARPA spending that would help meet infrastructure needs at McSherry Gardens. Cliff suggested that staff and the WHP look at the Housing Plan and see what priorities match up with ARPA eligible uses. He also said that ARPA could help with affordable housing developments that have recently been proposed. Larry noted that ARPA could be used for specific projects or, with appropriate language, investment capital for the housing trust. Councilor Palomba said the WHP should make recommendations. He noted that the Council referred the subject of ARPA spending to the Budget Committee last year and was likely to do so again. David asked if there was any guidance as to what percentage of ARPA funds should go to housing. Larry said there is not, but noted that of the four statutory spending categories, housing is under only one of them, so there are many competing uses.

Fred asked that staff prepare a proposal, or options, to be considered at the next meeting.

III. Updates on pending matters

a. Emergency rental assistance program

Larry reported that the funds committed by the City and Community Foundation (through state grants) are now exhausted. There have been 88 enrolled households (including 20 Housing Authority tenants). The Foundation received a new state grant in January and expects to commit \$50-60,000 to rental assistance; the program is likely to be like the one in place during 2020-21. This allows time for the City to evaluate the current situation and decide whether to

commit additional resources and how to structure a new program. Metro West is still preparing a report. A particular question to resolve is how many enrolled households actually received state RAFT money.

On the state level, rental assistance is being provided at a rate of \$50M per month. The state will exhaust the allocated funds by June 30, 2022 and will close new applications on April 15. In the advocacy community there is now discussion of getting new state funds for rental assistance, with a target number of \$700M to last through June 30, 2023. One of the issues on a state level—as it will be on a local level—is whether rental assistance is still emergency help or whether it is/should be a long-term response to systemic economic issues.

b. Municipal affordable housing trust

Larry noted that the Council authorized creation of a [Municipal Affordable Housing Trust](#) at the November 23, 2021 meeting. The next step is advertising the trustee positions and going through the selection process.

c. Nexus Study

Karl F. Seidman Consulting started work on the [nexus study](#) in early January. The first phase is gathering information from employers, building owners, employees, and real estate agents. The study is on target to conclude by June 30, 2022, or earlier. Councilor Palomba noted that there are major commercial developments in the pipeline and hoped that there was a way to expedite the study. Larry said the study was moving as quickly as possible. David and Cliff said that a voluntary commitment to support affordable housing was possible.

d. St. Joseph’s Hall elevator replacement

Larry noted that Metro West has funding commitments for this project, including about \$224,000 from the WestMetro HOME Consortium and Watertown’s \$146,000 in past program income. There are still HUD regulatory requirements to complete but the project is still on track for installation this spring.

e. Accessory dwelling units

The draft ordinance will be brought back for discussion at a future meeting.

f. Local preference policy

The council committees began discussing the [local preference policy](#) on September 16 but tabled action. It is expected that the Council will refer implementation of the housing plan to committee early in 2022, possibly on January 25.

IV. Other business

During discussion of possible uses of ARPA funding, there was a brief digression about the 1 Rosary Drive project. Metro West Collaborative previously presented on this project (to convert the former convent building into a 23-unit affordable senior housing project). Larry reported that Metro West is no longer pursuing the project because of the difficult economics. Alisa Gardner-Todreas/Metro West provided more information, indicating that the purchase price was too high for the numbers to work, and that the owner was unwilling to reduce the price. Fred said that in his opinion the site was better suited to a “group home” development because of the high cost of converting the dorm-like rooms to one bedroom apartments.

Mike reported that the Housing Authority is doing a capital needs assessment of McSherry Gardens and Lexington Gardens. David asked about the timing of the Authority's application for CPA funding of the 103 Nichols Ave project. Mike said that the CPC has requested information but has not scheduled a presentation yet.

Meeting adjourned at 7:27 pm.