



# CITY OF WATERTOWN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

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## Minutes of Watertown Housing Partnership Meeting February 15, 2022 6 PM, Remote Participation Only

### **Members in Attendance**

Fred Reynolds (Chair), Cliff Cook, David Leon, Helen Oliver, Michael Lara.  
Non-members present: Larry Field (staff), Tony Palomba.

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

Minutes of January 18, 2022 were reviewed and approved unanimously.

#### **II. FY2023 Annual Action Plan (WestMetro HOME Consortium)**

Larry reminded members of the HOME annual action plan timeline: submission of a final plan to HUD in June, public hearing for the consortium plan in early April and a comment period before finalized for submission, the Watertown draft finalized in time to be included in the advertised plan for hearing. Members were generally comfortable with the draft, with Cliff suggesting that the location of the Housing Authority's learning center be identified as Lexington Gardens and that the nexus study be discussed. With those changes, there was consensus that the draft be finalized for public hearing.

#### **III. Housing Priorities for ARPA Funding**

Larry noted that he made a [presentation](#) on ARPA funding last meeting that 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. Members asked him to return with a recommendation or options. Larry presented a chart listing six categories of potential ARPA spending (attached as the last page of these minutes).

At Helen's suggestion, Larry summarized the housing allocations made by the surrounding communities. Members asked about the status of Council consideration of ARPA spending. Councilor Palomba confirmed that there has been referral to committee but no substantive discussion yet.

Cliff and Fred indicated some concern about recommending funds for the housing trust without identifying specific projects. Councilor Palomba said he would be advocating for funding the trust. There was discussion of "buying" down rental units, with David suggesting it might be better to bring units from 65% to 50%, and others thinking 80% to 65% is appropriate.

Michael brought up 103 Nichols Avenue as a project that would create new units (fitting category 1). He said the Community Preservation Committee scheduled the 103 Nichols presentation for March 17. It is clear, he said, that CPC members are concerned about CPA being the sole funding for the project. Cliff asked if it would help for the WHP to recommend ARPA spending on the project. Michael said it would help. Cliff moved (Helen seconded) that

the WHP recommend \$500,000 in ARPA funding for 103 Nichols while it continued to consider a comprehensive recommendation to the Council. The motion passed unanimously.

Fred brought up another project that might need help: the Watertown-Belmont Church on Mt. Auburn Street has issued a RFP for redevelopment of part of the site and affordable housing is one possibility. The RFP has a May deadline. Members agreed that this potential project should be on the March agenda.

Fred asked that staff prepare more detail on each of the potential categories to advance discussion at the next meeting.

#### **IV. Updating 2015 Comprehensive Plan**

Larry reported that the City Council decided to update the 2015 Comprehensive Plan because so many of the strategies have already been implemented. The City received a \$59,000 state grant to assist in a deeper focus on land use, economic development, and transportation. In addition, because of the need to replace the expiring Open Space plan submitted to the state, that element was added as a deeper focus.

The City selected Stantec to lead the consultant team and work is being now. The public engagement model the City intends to use will emphasize general public contacts, as well as targeted outreach to stakeholders and workshops centered on key issues. There will be a small Planning Advisory Committee (7 members) that will counsel staff on public engagement and identification of key issues. Four members will represent organizations: City Council, Planning Board, Conservation Commission and Watertown Business Coalition. Three members will be residents selected by the City (notice sent out/posted): one with transportation expertise and two members of under-represented populations in the community, including but not limited to non-native English speaking community members, families with children, younger adults, and shift workers.

Cliff said he was disturbed that there was no one on the committee specifically focused on housing issues. Larry said the City was trying to avoid a model where each issue had a representative. David said he would have liked to have individuals with a disability listed. Larry said it was the intent to include such individuals in this category.

#### **V. Updates on pending matters**

##### **a. Emergency rental assistance program**

Larry reported that the Watertown Community Foundation's new rental/utility assistance program is just starting, as state funds were delayed. With respect to a potential new program funded by the City, the situation is in a "holding pattern." Staff is waiting for further data from Metro West Collaborative about the household assisted in 2020-21.

##### **b. Municipal affordable housing trust**

The City received 12 applications for the six trustee positions for the to-be-formed [Municipal Affordable Housing Trust](#). The City is pleased with the number and expertise of the applicants. Applicants will be interviewed in March.

**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. Staff will be meeting with Seidman next week and will get an update on the data collected and next steps.

**d. Local preference policy**

The council committees that began discussing the [local preference policy](#) on September 16, 2021 have not reconvened on this subject. A rental housing project (166 Main Street) will be applying for DHCD approval of its marketing plan in the next month or so. To fit within the new policy, the owner will request that 2 of the 5 units be subject to local preference.

**IV. Other business**

None.

Meeting adjourned at 7:17 pm.

**POTENTIAL HOUSING PRIORITIES FOR ARPA FUNDING** For discussion purposes only  
 2/15/22

<b>Id</b>	<b>Housing Priority</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Specific Example</b>	<b>Potential Cost</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
1	Production of new affordable units	2A	Allocation to affordable housing trust for pre-development activities, with condition that funds support units at/below 65% AMI	\$1M or more	Commitment in 2022, use by 12/31/2026
2	Deepening affordability of new affordable units	2C	Work with developer to shift inclusionary units from 80% to 65% AMI thresholds	\$200,000-300,000 per unit	Commitment and use by 12/31/2024
3	Critical capital improvements for public housing	2B	WHA needs funding for critical building and site improvements at McSherry Gardens	Phase 1: \$643,000 Stormwater: \$250,000 Phase 2: \$1.5M+	Commitment in 2022, use by 12/31/2026
4	Critical capital improvements for other affordable developments	5C	Marshall Place needs funding for critical building improvements, e.g. for elevator replacement and accessibility	\$225,000 or more	Commitment and use by 12/31/2024
5	Rental assistance	5D	Program targeted at below 65% AMI	\$600,000 over 3 years	Commitment in 2022, use by 12/31/2024
6	Counselling to promote housing stability	5D	Case worker to assist tenants, e.g. by identifying resources and developing realistic plan	\$150,00-180,000 over 3 years	Commitment in 2022, use by 12/31/2024