



CITY OF WATERTOWN

Watertown Housing Partnership

The Watertown Housing Partnership of the City of Watertown will hold a public meeting. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, this meeting will only have remote opportunities for participation with public access provided as follows:

WATERTOWN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP MEETING TUESDAY, APRIL 19, 2022 AT 6:00 PM AGENDA

ACCESS INFORMATION:

- A. The meeting will be televised through WCATV (Watertown Cable Access Television): <http://vodwcatv.org/CablecastPublicSite/watch/3?channel=3>
 - B. The Public may join the virtual meeting online: <https://watertown-ma.zoom.us/j/91712481602>
 - C. Public may join the virtual meeting audio only by phone: (877) 853-5257 or (888) 475-4499 (Toll Free) and enter Webinar ID: 917 1248 1602
 - D. Public may comment through email: lfield@watertown-ma.gov
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- 1. Approval of Minutes of March 15, 2022 Meeting
- 2. Housing Priorities for ARPA Funding
 - A. Supporting document: further revised housing priorities chart
- 3. Watertown Affordable Housing Trust: formation/transition plan
- 4. Affordable Housing Production Report--2021
- 5. Updates on pending matters:
 - A. Emergency Rental Assistance Program
 - B. Nexus study
 - C. MBTA Communities/multifamily zoning requirement
- 6. Other Business

POTENTIAL HOUSING PRIORITIES FOR ARPA FUNDING

For discussion purposes only 4/19/22

Id	Housing Priority	Strategy	Specific Example	Potential Cost	Timeline
1a	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	\$500,000	Commitment in 2022, use by 12/31/2026
1b		2A, 2B, 3C	Commitment to specific affordable housing projects in pipeline	\$500,000 103 Nichols Ave	Same
2	Critical capital improvements for public housing	2B	WHA needs funding for critical building and site improvements at McSherry Gardens	Phase 1: \$643,000 Stormwater: \$200,000 Phase 2: \$1.5M+ Note	Commitment in 2022, use by 12/31/2026
3	Critical capital improvements for other affordable developments	5C	Marshall Place needs funding for critical building improvements, e.g. for elevator modernization and accessibility	\$225,000 or more	Commitment and use by 12/31/2024
4	Rental assistance	5D	Program targeted at below 65% AMI	\$600,000 over 3 years	Commitment in 2022, use by 12/31/2024
5	Counselling to promote housing stability	5D	Case worker to assist tenants, e.g. by identifying resources and developing realistic plan for household	\$100,000-200,000 over 3 years	Commitment in 2022, use by 12/31/2024

One possible priority (buy-down of rental units in new inclusionary buildings) was eliminated.

Note: There was discussion of removing this line or ranking it below other priorities.

PRIORITY 1: Production of new affordable units

1a: Allocation to affordable housing trust for pre-development activities, with condition that funds support units at/below 65% AMI

The City Council authorized formation of a Watertown Affordable Housing Trust in November 2021. The City Manager's office is currently in the process of selecting six trustees for confirmation by the Council. When the formation process is completed later this year, it will need investment capital for its first years of operation.

The Trust will engage in pre-development investment in potential affordable housing projects and, in particular, work with developers to identify sites for such housing. The Trust's investment could include helping to obtain site control or funding "due diligence" on a proposed project, such as a feasibility analysis or site testing. This is a role that will complement the work of the Community Preservation Committee. While there will be a CPA funding round each year--and the CPC may consider urgent requests between rounds—the Trust can fund pre-development activities that lead to better CPA applications.

In order to be an eligible use of ARPA funds, the Trust likely will need to enter into a written agreement that the funds be used for an affordable housing project targeted at below 65% AMI and that the funding will meet ARPA timing requirements.

1b: Commitment to specific affordable housing projects in pipeline

103 Nichols Avenue: Watertown Housing Authority has proposed building six special needs units on a vacant site owned by the Authority. 103 Nichols Avenue would serve as a group home to serve adult men and women with distinct degrees of intellectual and developmental needs. The WHA has identified state resources to provide operating subsidies for the units. To fund the building and site improvements, the WHA is currently asking the Community Preservation Committee for about \$939,000, the state for \$398,000 and expects a \$187,000 first

mortgage. On February 15, the WHP voted to recommend a \$500,000 contribution from ARPA funds if CPA and/or other funds are committed for the remainder.

PRIORITY 2: Critical capital improvements for public housing

WHA needs funding for critical building and site improvements at various sites.

McSherry Gardens: The Watertown Housing Authority is currently proposing a two-phase capital improvement at the McSherry Gardens elderly complex (40 units). The first phase involves an addition to the Community Building to provide accessible common space and an addition to Building 3 to make one unit accessible. Phase 1 also involves site improvements to provide accessibility. This phase was permitted by the Zoning Board of Appeals in 2021. [The total cost for Phase 1 is estimated at \\$3.23 million.](#) While the WHA has funding for most of this phase, a \$643,000 gap remains. In addition, this phase requires stormwater improvements (\$200,000) for which there is no funding source.

Phase 2 at McSherry Gardens involves modernizing the kitchens and flooring in most of the complex. Assuming a construction start in June 2023, the kitchen renovations would cost approximately \$897,000 (32 units) and flooring approximately \$618,000 (38 units) for a total of \$1.515 million. This would include design and abatement costs. No zoning approval would be required. No funding has been identified for this phase.

PRIORITY 3: Critical capital improvements for other affordable developments

Marshall Place: This historic building contains 11 affordable apartments for seniors. The project needs funding for critical building improvements: 1) elevator modernization at approximately \$200,000, with additional cost for temporary relocation of some tenants; 2) accessibility, water-saving, and entrance improvements at approximately \$18,000. The total would be more than \$250,000.

PRIORITY 4: Rental assistance

Program targeted at below 65% AMI: The City could offer rental assistance to households that are income-eligible (below 65% AMI). Before proposing such a program, discussion should include the following points:

- Should applicants be required to show COVID impact or should that be presumed because of their income level?
- Should rental assistance to a household be limited to a fixed number of months?
- Should rental assistance be available to households who are receiving other public housing assistance?
- Should rental assistance be conditioned upon application for other housing resources (e.g., RAFT)? Conditioned on meeting with a case worker?
- Should the amount of rental assistance be capped at a certain amount per bedroom or cover a certain percentage of rent?

PRIORITY 5: Counselling to promote housing stability

Case worker to assist tenants, e.g. by identifying resources and developing realistic plan for household.

Between 2013 and mid-2021, Wayside operated its Watertown Social Services Resource Specialist (SSRS) Program with one case worker funded by the City. In mid-2021, Wayside received funding from the Watertown Community Foundation to add a second, half-time case worker. The WCF funding expires on July 31, 2022 and it is not clear whether the Foundation will continue this support.¹

SSRS counseling covers the full range of issues experienced by client households, including mental health and addiction. Even before COVID, a substantial percentage of the cases involved housing issues. Wayside helped

¹ The City's SSRS funding is also subject to annual budget appropriation.

clients find public rental assistance (public housing, Section 8, affordable units) and worked with clients in crisis (notices to quit, need for emergency shelter, etc). COVID increased demand for such counseling. Wayside referred clients to Watertown's emergency rental assistance program funded by City/Community Foundation resources and helped clients apply for state RAFT/ERMA money.

If the City wished to support a case worker sited at Wayside, options include using ARPA money to fund: 1) the current half-time case worker if the WCF cannot continue its support, 2) a full-time case worker with additional WCF support, or 3) a full-time case worker without WCF help. The estimated yearly cost of a full-time Master's level clinician with foreign language fluency is \$65,000. Depending on the option chosen, the three-year cost is in the \$100,000 to \$200,000 range.



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SUBMITTED ONLINE AND BY EMAIL

March 29, 2022

Jennifer D. Maddox
Undersecretary, Department of Housing and Community Development
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 300
Boston MA 02114

Re: Multi-Family Zoning Requirement for MBTA Communities

Undersecretary Maddox:

The City of Watertown respectfully submits these comments pertaining to the Department of Housing and Community Development's draft guidelines on the multi-family zoning requirement for MBTA Communities. The City appreciates the Department's efforts to provide further clarity on new Section 3 of M.G.L. 40A. We believe that changes to the proposed definition of "bus station" will result in more multifamily zoning districts that achieve the statutory intent of allowing multifamily housing in transit-rich locations.

Summary

The draft definition—by requiring a building that serves riders inside—only applies to a handful of locations that are not rail stations. The definition does not fit locations like Watertown Square with multiple bus routes, including some that terminate around the Square. Watertown urges expanding the definition to include hubs that function as a station by virtue of having stops for multiple bus lines clustered within a short distance of each other.

The narrow bus station definition has significant consequences in Watertown. The absence of a building in Watertown serving riders leaves the City with no choice but to use a poor location

for multifamily zoning. Since the City has land area within ½ mile of a Belmont commuter rail stop—ironically, with no building—this dictates the zone’s location.¹

Background

A. Legislative Intent

The legislative intent of new Section 3 of M.G.L. 40A is clear: to create the opportunity for development of multifamily housing in transit-rich locations. Following a Special Senate Committee Report on Housing in 2016 that proposed a multifamily zoning requirement, the Senate passed one in a zoning reform bill (Senate 2311) that spring. Although that initial version applied to all communities, it required the zoning districts be in “eligible locations” as defined by M.G.L. 40R (smart growth). Under 40R, areas near transit are eligible locations.

The version enacted in January 2021 was limited to MBTA communities and required zoning districts be near transit facilities “if applicable.” Bus station was not defined in any version of the enacted bill.

One can infer from this history that the legislature was more interested in transit access than in having a physical structure or in what services are provided within the structure. A bus stop, a bus stop with shelter, or bus station with a building provide essentially the same transit access if there is only one bus route. But, as discussed later in the context of Watertown Square, a transit hub with multiple bus routes going in different directions is very different than any of those single-route situations.

B. Draft Guidelines

The Draft Guidelines define “bus station” as:

...a building located at the intersection of two or more public bus lines, within which services are available to bus passengers; provided that a bus station does not include a shelter or other structure without walls and a foundation.

Elsewhere in the Draft Guidelines, the Department interprets the statute so that if a municipality has only one qualifying transit station it must locate its multifamily district within the resulting ½ mile radius. While the municipality may extend the district beyond the ½ mile radius, at least 50% of the district must be within that area. Thus, the definition of bus station may—and does in Watertown—determine where a substantial multifamily zone must be located.

¹ If consistent with the statute, Watertown would also support locational flexibility when the station area is undevelopable or there is an alternative location that is clearly superior.

C. Bus Stations that Do—and Don't--Fit the Definition

There appear to be only a handful of locations within the MBTA communities that fit the proposed definition.² The Arlington Heights Busway (1389 Massachusetts Avenue) is a bus station that has a waiting area (although it has been closed to passengers for two years because of COVID). There are three regional transit authorities with buildings (the Buckley Transportation Center in Lawrence, the Gallagher Terminal in Lowell, and the GATRA headquarters building in Taunton).

On the other hand, Watertown currently has six bus lines serving its commercial center but does not fit the definition. "Watertown Yard" presently serves as the terminus for three lines (52, 57, 504). "Watertown Terminal" in the Square serves as the terminus for two lines (59, 71) and a third line stops nearby (70). Watertown Yard was the terminus of a seventh line that was suspended because of COVID (502). The Yard and the Terminal are less than 500 feet apart.

In 2021, the 57 bus was ranked 4th in ridership in the entire MBTA system with nearly 50,000 weekly passengers, while the 70 bus was ranked 15th with nearly 30,000 weekly passengers. The Watertown Square bus hub connects passengers to other significant hubs within Boston's inner core, including Downtown Boston, Copley Square, Kenmore Square, Allston, Brighton, Harvard Square, Central Square/Cambridge, Newton Centre, and Newton Corner. A chart with information about Watertown's bus routes is attached as "A."

Under the draft guidelines, the robust bus facilities around Watertown Square do not qualify as a bus station. Watertown Yard is a large parcel with a building serving drivers and a second building as a maintenance facility. It also has a large park-and-ride lot where the MBTA collects revenue. It is the only bus-only location in the MBTA system that has a park-and-ride facility according to the MBTA's "Parking—Stations and Rates" online pages. Watertown Terminal has no building but has a dedicated area for short-term bus parking. Drivers can lock their buses and walk to the Watertown Yard building.

D. Why Watertown is Concerned by the Definition

If Watertown had no qualifying transit station within ½ mile, the Draft Guidelines would allow the City to use a set of smart growth criteria to select a suitable location. However, Waverly Station in Belmont is a qualifying commuter rail station with a ½ mile radius that clips the northwest corner of Watertown. Approximately 46 acres in Watertown are within this ½ mile area. Accordingly, the proposed "bus station" definition requires Watertown to locate its multifamily zoning district in this northwest corner and not around Watertown Square.

² Intermodal facilities may also contain a bus station, but they would be considered qualifying transit stations even without bus service.

Comparing the two areas, there is no question but that using Watertown Square promotes the legislative intent and using Waverly Station defeats it:

- The Waverly station area is built-out with existing residential uses and undevelopable land: 93% of the parcels have existing homes (mainly one- and two-families and town homes) and 3.7% is a large cemetery. Beyond the ½ mile radius are similar neighborhoods. In contrast, Watertown Square includes a wide variety of uses that could be redeveloped for housing, including commercial, manufacturing, auto-related, and medical/educational property.
- The Waverly station area in Watertown does not have reasonable access to the station itself because of poor road connections. In contrast, both Watertown Yard and Watertown Terminal offer pedestrian and bike access (and the park-and-ride facility).
- If the City were to rezone the existing residential neighborhood within ½ mile of Waverly, there would be virtually no retail or other amenities to serve residents of a new multifamily development. Watertown Square is the City's central business district.

The far better outcome is for Watertown Square (or Yard and Terminal) to serve as a qualifying transit station. We believe this is true in other communities as well.

Improving the Draft Definition

A. Alternative Definition

Watertown asks that DHCD expand the definition to include hubs that function as a station by virtue of having stops for multiple bus lines clustered within a short distance of each other.

One example of a workable definition is:

“Bus station” means either: (1) a building located at the intersection of two or more public bus lines, within which services are available to bus passengers, provided that a bus shelter or structure without walls and foundation is not such a building; or (2) a bus hub that functions as a station by virtue of having stops for four or more public bus lines within 1/8 mile radius of each other.³

³ DHCD could further expand this alternative definition by requiring only three lines within the hub or narrow it by requiring that at least one route terminate within that radius or requiring that the bus routes serving that station area meet transportation efficiency metrics. Other factors that might be considered are whether a location offers high frequency service, express service, or opportunity to transfer to other lines/other modes.

B. The Proposed Alternative Would Promote Legislative Intent

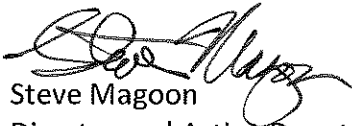
An expanded definition of “bus station” would increase the number of required multifamily zoning districts in areas with robust transit access-- and suitable for multifamily zoning. There are several downtowns/town centers without a qualifying transit station under the draft guidelines because they lack a building that serves bus riders. Any definition that requires a building misses the way in which many bus hubs operate—with multiple routes offering stops clustered around a commercial area. These hubs serve the same function as a station: giving riders multiple transit choices, particularly if the routes go in different directions.

Three prominent examples are Watertown Square (discussed on p. 3), Arlington Center, and Medford Square. Arlington Center has stops for five bus routes (the 67, 77, 87, 95, and 350). There are six routes stopping around Medford Square (the 94, 95, 96, 101, 134, 354). Arlington and Medford are not in the same conundrum as Watertown: both have qualifying transit stations under the draft guidelines. However, the proposed changes would make clear that these communities would be able to locate all or part of their qualifying multifamily zone in their commercial heart.

Conclusion

The City of Watertown asks that the final guidelines provide a bus station definition including hubs that function as a station by virtue of having stops for multiple bus lines clustered within a short distance of each other.

Sincerely,



Steve Magoon

Director and Acting Deputy City Manager

cc: Mike Kennealy, Secretary, Housing and Economic Development
Jamey L. Tesler, Secretary and Chief Executive Officer, MassDOT
Steve Poftak, General Manager, MBTA
Members of Watertown City Council
Tom Tracy, Acting City Manager, Watertown

ATTACHMENT A: BUS ROUTES AROUND WATERTOWN SQUARE

Route	Terminus	Other terminus	Route includes	Ridership rank 2021	Weekly riders 2021	Notes
52	Yard	Dedham Mall	Newton Corner, Newton Centre	132	1,039	
57	Yard	Kenmore Square	Newton Corner, Brighton, Allston	4	47,987	
502	Yard (Express)					Suspended because of pandemic
504	Yard (Express)	Downtown Boston	Newton Corner, Brighton, Allston, Kenmore Square, Copley Square	98	4,002	
59	Terminal	Needham Junction	Newtonville, Newton Highlands, Newton Upper Falls	105	3,548	Also stops on Watertown St
71	Terminal	Harvard		33	14,221	
70		Waltham, Central Sq (Cambridge)	Allston	15	28,955	Inbound/outbound in different locations on Main St in the Square

Distance between Yard and Terminal is 422 feet.

Distance from Watertown Yard to outbound 70 is 583 feet, inbound 70 is 882 feet, both in Square.