



CITY 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 March 15, 2022 6 PM, Remote Participation Only

Members in Attendance

Fred Reynolds (Chair), Cliff Cook, David Leon, Helen Oliver (until about 6:30), Michael Lara, Torey Dean.

Non-members present: Larry Field (staff), Tony Palomba, Emily Izzo, David Koven, Gary Richards, and Greg Rittchen.

I. Review of Draft Minutes

Minutes of February 15, 2022 were reviewed and approved unanimously.

II. Watertown-Belmont Church/80 Mt. Auburn Street

Fred introduced the Watertown-Belmont Church briefing by noting the high acquisition/development costs for affordable housing. David Koven, the Church's housing consultant, said about .4 acre is available for sale; this consists of two stucco buildings and land immediately around them. Koven said that affordable housing is the Church's preferred use for the property; the Church has told potential bidders that a deed restriction would be required to ensure long-term affordability. Three affordable housing developers remain interested. Koven said the Church also engaged a commercial broker to consider other uses that would align with the Church's mission. Bids will be opened in May.

Fred pointed out that parking requirements and historic district restrictions are barriers to developing affordable housing on the site. Koven said the Church has pointed out potential constraints and invited bidders to conduct due diligence on all issues. Cliff asked how long the affordability restriction would last; Koven said 99 years was the present thinking.

III. Housing Priorities for ARPA Funding

Larry noted that members asked him to return with a revised menu of potential housing priorities for ARPA funding and more detail on each potential priority. He presented the revised chart (attached as the last page of these minutes).

[Note: there was a [presentation](#) on ARPA funding at the January 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.]

Larry explained the three major changes from the last meeting: 1) the proposed allocation to the trust was reduced to \$250,000 reflecting the WHP's desire to focus more on specific projects, 2) the "buy down" idea was refined, so that it would involve deeper affordability limited to 30 years, and 3) the "case worker" idea was refined, so that the assistance would support a half-time or full-time worker depending on other available funding.

There was extensive discussion touching on the potential priorities. To simplify the minutes, the comments below have been organized by area:

- Funding Housing Trust: There was consensus that the recommended funding amount should be \$500,000 rather than \$250,000.
- Buying down rental units: There were questions about whether and how such a program could be implemented. Cliff noted that this idea is untested and noted that the state might not allow the city to buy down the affordability of a specific unit as affordable units generally “float.” There was consensus to drop this category.
- Capital improvements for public housing: Michael said that the housing authority is realistic about how much of the McSherry Gardens improvements can receive ARPA funding. He said it would make sense to de-emphasize or even eliminate the Phase 2 funding because of its size (\$1.5 million+). Councilor Palomba said that Phase 2 was not likely to be funded through ARPA. Michael also said there is a lower estimate now for the stormwater work (\$200,000). David asked about the overall cost of Phase 1 and Michael explained that the cost approaches \$3 million, with \$643,000 representing the current gap. There was consensus to reduce these numbers.
- Capital improvements for other affordable housing: Two members noted that elevator modernization in a building with elderly units should be viewed as a critical issue.
- Rental assistance: Cliff thought there might not be support for a rental assistance program unless linked to COVID economic impact and limited in time/scope. Larry noted that the ARPA funding narrative lists questions about rental assistance that should be resolved before any program is recommended. Councilor Palomba noted that there was discussion of rental assistance even before COVID; in particular, something like Waltham’s first/last/security deposit program was considered.
- Case worker: Cliff thought that there should be \$50,000 in down payment assistance linked to this so that the case worker would have a resource to employ.

In addition to discussion of specific priorities, there were comments about the timing and overall size of any recommendation. Councilor Izzo said that the Budget Committee would discuss ARPA funding at its March 21 meeting but expected the committee to focus on process. Michael said that paring down the list to bring it below \$3 million and around 25% of the City’s ARPA funding would be appropriate. Cliff said the WHP could rank the priorities.

Fred asked staff to bring back a revised chart at the April meeting so that the WHP could continue its discussion.

IV. **MBTA Communities/multifamily zoning requirement**

Larry noted that City Council authorized filing a comment with the Department of Housing and Community Development proposing a better “bus station” definition in the MBTA Communities guidelines. Comments on the draft guidelines are due March 31.

V. **Updates on pending matters**

a. **Emergency rental assistance program**

Larry reported that the Watertown Community Foundation's new rental assistance program started in February and that the \$50,000 is committed to assisting approximately 21 households over a two-month period.

b. **Municipal affordable housing trust**

Larry said that interviews started March 15 for the six trustee positions for the to-be-formed [Municipal Affordable Housing Trust](#).

c. **Nexus Study**

Larry reported that the nexus study is more than halfway to completion.

d. **St. Joseph's Hall elevator replacement**

Larry said that the elevator project is likely to occur in fall 2022. Metro West Collaborative needs to meet several requirements before the project can begin, including "underwriting" by the WestMetro HOME Consortium, drafting and approval of a tenant relocation plan and amending the funding and regulatory agreements.

IV. **Other business**

None.

Meeting adjourned at 7:31 pm.

POTENTIAL HOUSING PRIORITIES FOR ARPA FUNDING For discussion purposes only 3/15/22

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	\$250,000	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	Deepening affordability of new affordable units	2C	Work with developer to shift inclusionary units from 80% to 65% AMI thresholds	\$300,000-400,000 over 3 years	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 modernization 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 for household	\$100,000-200,000 over 3 years	Commitment in 2022, use by 12/31/2024