



# 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](http://www.watertown-ma.gov)

## Minutes of Watertown Housing Partnership Meeting April 19, 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), Tony Palomba, Liz Cremens, Alisa Gardner-Todreas.

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

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

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

Larry reported that the Council's Budget Committee decided on a process for recommending ARPA spending to the full Council: 1) an ARPA survey to be posted online, 2) public forum (likely in May), 3) recommendations by Department heads, 4) draft plan to be the subject of a second public forum, and 6) report/recommendations to the Council

Larry shared the draft housing priorities chart, as revised during the last meeting. In addition to discussing individual items, he invited members to discuss whether to propose an ARPA spending "package" on housing priorities or, as Cliff suggested at the last meeting, rank the priorities without recommending a total amount of spending. The members agreed that ranking was the better approach and that the WHP should identify three "tiers."

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

- Funding Housing Trust: There was consensus that this should be in the first (highest) tier and that the number should be raised substantially from \$500,000.
- 103 Nichols: Michael said the project was not ready to move ahead and that the Housing Authority would withdraw its request that it be on the WHP list. He said the Authority was now asking the Community Preservation Committee for funding to advance the project's planning and design.
- Capital improvements for public housing: Members felt it was important to support the McSherry Gardens Phase I and stormwater improvements. Since Phase II is farther in the future and is a large and more uncertain number, there was agreement it should go in the lowest tier.
- Capital improvements for other affordable housing: Members agreed that Marshall Place modernization should be in the middle tier.
- Rental assistance: Cliff thought it was unclear that \$600,000 over three years would be needed for a rental assistance program. There was also agreement that there likely will be other sources of rental assistance in the short-term, while the same was not true for

capital improvements. Members agreed that rental assistance should be in the third tier and be projected at \$400,000.

- Case worker: Several members said that counseling was an effective way of helping households affected by COVID, as their situations are not as clear-cut as they were when COVID triggered loss of jobs and part-time work. Alisa Gardner-Todreas from Metro West Collaborative said that the cost of hiring a full-time case worker with the requisite qualifications was more like \$100,000 (with benefits). Michael and Councilor Palomba agreed. It was agreed that \$250,000 over 2 ½ years was a reasonable figure.
- Capital improvements for affordable home ownership units: Alisa asked whether the WHP had considered recommending a program to support owners of affordable units who needed to improve their properties. Members discussed this possibility. David noted that when Watertown had such a program it was complex to administer and that sometimes improvements triggered the need to do expensive lead paint remediation that was not anticipated.

Cliff moved that the WHP authorize staff to draft a letter to the Budget Committee with the following housing priorities in tiers 1 to 3 and with the accompanying projected figures:

<b>Tier (1 highest)</b>	<b>Housing Priority</b>	<b>Projected cost</b>
1	Watertown Affordable Housing Trust for affordable housing at/below 65% AMI	\$1 million
1	McSherry Gardens: Phase I (\$643,000 gap) and stormwater (420,000)	\$843,000
2	Marshall Place modernization	\$225,000
2	Case worker at Wayside Youth (2022-24)	\$250,000
3	Rental Assistance targeted at/below 65% AMI	
3	McSherry Gardens: Phase II improvements	\$1.5 million

Torey seconded the motion. By roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

**III. Housing Trust: formation/transition plan**

Larry noted that the six proposed trustees are now before the City Council for confirmation. Since the selections will be reviewed by the Economic Development & Planning Committee before a vote by the full Council, the earliest date for formation of the trust is just before the WHP meeting on June 21.

Larry proposed that when the trust is formed (or ready to be formed) WHP and Trust members meet for an informal social event to celebrate the transition. Larry said that the Massachusetts Housing Partnership has recorded webinars to train new trustees. In addition, MHP has agreed to “send” a representative to the initial trust meeting to answer best practice questions. Larry invited WHP members to email him separately to suggest any other ways to ease the transition. The WHP will also have the opportunity to discuss this further.

**IV. Affordable Housing Production Report—2021**

The Housing Plan created a goal that 15% of new homes over the next five years be deed-restricted affordable units. Fred suggested last year that a report be issued each year showing progress toward the goal. Larry described two different ways to measure housing production:

building permits issued, or certificates of occupancy issued. There are advantages and disadvantages to each. The Department's suggestion is to use both. Helen asked whether it would be hard to avoid duplication. Larry said the report would be transparent as to large projects (they would be identified by name/address) and that a spreadsheet kept by the City would track the small properties that would not be specifically identified in the report. Members were agreeable to using both metrics.

**V. Updates on pending matters**

**a. Emergency rental assistance program**

Alisa reported that the Watertown Community Foundation's new rental assistance program spent \$50,000 from a state grant to assist approximately 21 households over a two-month period. She said that applications are being accepted for an anticipated second \$50,000 grant.

**b. Nexus Study**

Larry reported that the analytical work for the nexus study is substantially complete. The consultant team is now writing the report, which is expected in May.

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

Larry said the City filed a comment with the Department of Housing and Community Development proposing a better "bus station" definition in the MBTA Communities guidelines. DHCD has promised to issue final guidelines during the summer.

**IV. Other business**

Fred noted that two potential housing developments are 104 Main Street (market-rate with inclusionary units) and the Watertown-Belmont Church (the church issued an RFP for affordable housing and is also considering non-residential uses).

Meeting adjourned at 7:25 pm.