



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 May 17, 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, Mark Krackiewicz, Alisa Gardner-Todreas.

I. Review of Draft Minutes

Minutes of April 19, 2022 were reviewed and approved unanimously.

II. Comprehensive Plan

Larry outlined the Plan's timeline: a baseline report, including existing conditions, vision and possibly goals, by June 30; work on specific strategies in fall and winter 2022; and a final report in March 2023. The visioning session is May 19. This agenda item, suggested by Fred, is for brainstorming affordable housing barriers and solutions that could be incorporated in the Plan.

Cliff said the Plan should discuss lowering the costs of producing affordable housing, with parking requirements and a zoning audit to identify problematic regulations as two examples. Fred said small-scale affordable housing projects are not feasible, with \$600,000/unit costs, and that projects need to be more than 20 units. Cliff suggested that a consultant study might give more weight to barriers/solutions. He also said that allowing an affordable developer to build more units than a market-rate developer on a given parcel would help even the playing field. Michael noted that quantifying the extent of displacement would be important. Cliff noted that HUD's CHAS dataset should be used by the Comp Plan consultants.

David asked how the Comp Plan will deal with the 2021-25 Housing Plan. Larry said the consultants will integrate the Housing Plan into their efforts, along with the proposed Climate Plan and other recent plans. He noted that the 2015 Plan incorporated the 2011 Economic Development Framework the same way and it became a critical foundation for the final report. Fred closed the discussion by saying that the next meeting will include an agenda item on a possible "barriers" document for the Comp Plan.

III. Nexus Study

Larry reported the nexus study has just been completed and will be sent to City Council in the next day. He said that the Council will need to make a threshold decision: whether to proceed at the Council level or refer to committee. There is some urgency if the Council wishes to obtain authorization from the legislature to adopt a linkage fee this year. The home rule process includes local adoption, filing the petition via Watertown's legislative delegation and then consideration before the legislature's formal session ends July 31.

Cliff asked whether the study covered workforce development as well as affordable housing. Larry said the consultants were asked to focus on the linkage between new commercial development and affordable housing demand. Councilor Palomba asked if the report contained recommendations; Larry said yes. There was discussion on whether the WHP could provide its views on the nexus study if the Council considered the issue at its May 24 meeting. Because of Open Meeting law, that timeframe would allow individual comments and, if a special meeting was noticed, possibly a WHP recommendation.

IV. Housing Trust: formation/transition plan

Larry noted that the six proposed trustees are scheduled to be interviewed by the Human Services Committee on May 26. Therefore, the earliest Council vote is June 14. Since additional steps will be needed (trustee signatures, filing of the trust, etc) a June 21 WHP meeting is likely.

Larry noted the last meeting touched on trustee training, particularly on operation of a housing trust under state law. For this meeting, he invited discussion of “lessons learned” by the WHP and suggested priorities for the trust. Fred noted that the trust would need to have someone fill his role of participating in Developer Conferences and attending Metro West Collaborative meetings. Helen noted that 3 current WHP members are proposed trustees, so it would be helpful to have other WHP members provide bullets on things to pass along. It was agreed that Larry would “interview” Fred and Michael to draft bullets for their review. Michael also noted he would like to do a Housing Authority presentation at a trust meeting.

V. Affordable Housing Production Report—2021

Larry briefly presented the 2021 report, which uses two different ways to measure housing production: building permits issued and certificates of occupancy issued. Using the first, there were no affordable units in 2021, using the second there were 49 (14.67% of new units). This initial report illustrates the ebb and flow of development, as the 2022 report will likely post significant numbers using either metric with 166 Main Street likely getting a building permit and 101 Morse getting certificates of occupancy. Members said using both measures made sense.

VI. Updates on pending matters

a. Emergency rental assistance program

Alisa reported that the Watertown Community Foundation’s rental assistance program has spent virtually all the second 2022 state grant. There are currently seven “pending” applications and she thinks the first three to complete the process will receive the last assistance. There was a discussion of additional funding sources, including ARPA.

b. Housing Priorities for ARPA Funding

Councilor Palomba, in the context of discussing rental assistance, said that the Council’s Budget Committee has not scheduled the next step in the ARPA process, which is a public forum that will include a presentation about ARPA and opportunity for public comment.

IV. Other business

Fred noted that he attended the Developer Conference for the 104 Main Street project (market-rate with inclusionary units). The project will propose rental units, including 22 affordable.

Meeting adjourned at 7:11 pm.