



CITY OF WATERTOWN AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST

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Minutes of Watertown Affordable Housing Trust Meeting May 22, 2023 6:30PM, Hybrid Participation

Members in Attendance

Cliff Cook, Jill Hyde, David Leon, Helen Oliver, Leo Patterson, and George Proakis (remote and joined meeting only for Other Business). Non-members present in person: Non-members present remotely: Larry Field (staff), Caitlin Madden, Jacky VanLeeuwen, Josh Rosmarin, Jamie Gordon, Elodia Thomas, Mark Krackiewicz, Jon Bockian and Michael Lara.

I. Minutes of April 18, 2023 meeting

The minutes of the April 18, 2023 meeting were unanimously accepted as written.

II. Housing Priorities for ARPA funding

Larry said there are five ARPA applications (none submitted yet) expected to involve housing: the Housing Authority for McSherry Gardens/Phase II, Marshall Place to replace its elevator, Metro West Collaborative for capital improvements needed at the Quimby Street Condos and for a Direct Assistance program to benefit households below 60% of area median income, and Wayside Youth for an additional case worker.

Larry observed that the City Council is uniquely in a position to assess and weigh community-wide needs and priorities. However, the Trust has a particular role in advising on housing priorities, based on the 2021 Housing Plan, and individual trustees have expertise that could be helpful. He offered several ways to differentiate between the proposals. One dimension was whether they created or preserved units or supported households. Other factors included cost per unit, duration of benefit, and the number of persons/households benefitting.

The trustees discussed each of the five proposals before discussing how to frame a letter or memo to the Budget & Fiscal Oversight Committee.

Direct Assistance (\$250,000)

Jill asked Caitlin Madden/Metro West to elaborate on how the Direct Assistance program would work; Caitlin said it was similar to the Newton program in providing \$1,000/person (up to \$3,000) directly to households and that demand exceeded the \$250,000 in funding. Leo asked why Metro West is proposing \$250,000 in Watertown; Caitlin said it was a balance between impact and awareness of the many competing proposals. Leo asked whether housing needs could be prioritized; Caitlin said the program's flexibility was important.

McSherry Gardens (estimated \$1,645,000)¹

Members asked Mike Lara/WHA about the extent of improvements at McSherry Gardens since the 1960s (no interior renovations) and whether the kitchens would be all-electric (yes). In reply to a question from Elodia Thomas, Mike said that the WHA could get matching funds from the state, but that the HILAPP program was competitive and limited in amount.

Marshall Place (\$91,788)

Members felt that the Marshall Place proposal was very reasonable value at \$8,000/unit and that a working elevator was essential in a project serving seniors.

Quimby Street Condos (\$334,203)

Cliff said it was important not to lose these four homeownership units but was concerned that structural changes in the association and a long-term capital plan were both needed for the project's sustainability. A member agreed and suggested that a 25-year capital needs assessment was needed. Cliff noted that the ARPA funding amount could be reduced if Metro West had time to work through various issues, including the resale price, the City's \$59,000 loan and DHCD's \$17,000 loan.

Caitlin said Metro West was working with other condo association members and that, as one step, the owners voted to increase condo fees with the short-term goal of meeting projected operating expenses and creating a \$1,500 capital reserve. Leo asked the rationale for meeting the capital improvement needs of a condo association. Cliff noted that affordable units have their resale value regulated so that an owner cannot use appreciation to fund improvements.

Wayside Youth (\$317,466)

Helen noted that this proposal was strongly related to needs amplified by COVID but was the least focused on housing. Cliff said the potential "con" was using one-time ARPA funding for a personnel need that arguably could be city funded. David said the funding could allow the city to evaluate the long-term need for an additional case worker, especially one with housing expertise. Jacky VanLeeuwen commented that Wayside was where Watertown residents go when they have pressing financial and/or mental health needs and that a direct assistance program was the right way to stabilize households at risk.

Further discussion on proposals

Members were positive about the value of the McSherry Gardens and Marshall Place proposals, both providing needed capital improvements at a reasonable cost per unit. Members also agreed that the Direct Assistance and Wayside proposals, while less directly tied to housing and not addressing one-time needs, served important goals.

¹ When submitted, the proposal was for \$1,769,308.

There was extensive discussion of the Quimby St proposal because of the need for a long-term plan for its sustainability. Jill noted that ARPA funding would address the current crisis and allow time to develop a long-term solution.

Members discussed various ways to frame their ARPA priorities and authorized Cliff and Larry to submit a memo providing the City Council with the Trust's insights without ranking the proposals. Larry asked whether the memo could note that the Trust was "open" to waiving the \$59,000 loan on Metro West's Quimby St unit; members agreed.

III. Quimby Street Condos

As there was no action needed on the Quimby St Condos project, there was no discussion of this item.

IV. Site identification and possible "on call" consulting contracts

The Request for Quotes for on call consultants went out to six architects and four LSPs (environmental issues). Larry will report on this procurement process at the next meeting.

Larry presented information about the last geographic area of the site inventory. He said that 31 of the 37 sites in the Arlington-Grove-Coolidge area had to be eliminated, mostly because of zoning. The inventory incorrectly included these parcels. Of the remaining seven, two are more than one acre and 5 are below.

V. CPA Public Hearing (June 15, 2023)

Larry noted that the Community Preservation Committee was holding its annual public hearing on June 15 and encouraged trustees and members of the public with housing ideas to attend.

VI. Other Business

George joined the meeting and noted that the FY24 budget proposed \$250,000 for the Trust. Larry noted that two individuals had written to encourage the Trust to move forward with a proposal to allow accessory dwelling units and noted that 104 Main Street received a favorable recommendation from the Planning Board and would be moving to the Zoning Board of Appeals. There being no other business, the trustees voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:38 pm.