CITY OF WATERTOWN
AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST
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Minutes of Watertown Affordable Housing Trust Meeting
October 16, 2023 6:00PM, Hybrid Participation

Members in Attendance
Cliff Cook, Jill Hyde, David Leon, Helen Oliver and Zoe Weinrobe (remote). Non-members present in person: Larry Field (staff), Brett Buehler. Non-members present remotely: Jacky VanLeeuwen, Alisa Gardner-Todreas, Linda Scott, Anthony Palomba, Olivia Fields, Joan Gumbleton, Mark Kraczkiewicz, and Josh Rosmarin.

I. Minutes of September 13, 2023 meeting
The minutes of the September 13, 2023 meeting were unanimously accepted (Helen abstained because she was not present at the prior meeting).

II. 104 Main Street Special Permit Application/proposed inclusionary units
Brett Buehler/O'Connor Management presented briefly on revisions to the proposed 104 Main Street mixed-use development now pending at the Zoning Board of Appeals. Buehler said that the petitioner had decided to eliminate the partial 6th floor and make other changes to the floor plans to address concerns raised during the permitting process. As a result, the total number of rental units has been reduced from 142 to 137 and, accordingly, the number of affordable rents reduced from 22 to 21. In addition, the size of many units has been reduced and the location changed. Buehler showed the trustees a revised affordable housing plan (attached) identifying the affordable units by bedroom configuration and location. David moved that the Trust accept the revised plan, Jill seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Buehler also asked that the Trust write a letter to the United States Post Office about locating the Watertown Square branch in the new building. Buehler explained that he is asking various community groups to write the Post Office, which is considering the developer's proposal to find a temporary location for the branch during construction and to provide a suitable space (including a garage configuration that would work for postal vehicles). There was a consensus that the Trust should write a letter that was carefully phrased, with Cliff and Larry to draft it and David and Jill to review the draft.

III. WestMetro HOME Consortium (background presentation)
Larry made a presentation about Watertown's role in the WestMetro HOME Consortium (attached).

IV. **Other Business**

Larry noted that the tax legislation recently signed by Governor Healy includes language authorizing municipalities to provide a property tax exemption to homeowners willing to rent space to income-qualified households at an affordable housing rate. Larry said the provision allows municipalities considerable flexibility in structuring such a program. He said the provision would be worth discussing at a future meeting.

V. **Executive Session**

Cliff said there was information to discuss in executive session pursuant to the provisions of G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(6), particularly to consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property where an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body. The trustees voted unanimously to go into executive session and a motion to adjourn the public meeting passed unanimously at approximately 7:00 PM.

WestMetro HOME Consortium

WATERTOWN AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST

OCTOBER 16, 2023

HOME Investment Partnership Program

- HOME is a federally funded program that assists in the production & preservation of affordable housing
- The program funds a broad range of activities including construction, acquisition, rehabilitation & rental assistance
- HOME uses states, entitlement communities and local “consortiums” to administer the yearly grant allocations
- Grant and loan recipients include developers and non-profit organizations designated as Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs)

WestMetro HOME Consortium

- Watertown belongs to the 13-community consortium led by City of Newton—the WestMetro HOME Consortium
- Other members are: Bedford, Belmont, Brookline, Concord, Framingham, Lexington, Natick, Needham, Sudbury, Waltham and Wayland
- Until recently, HOME has been the city’s chief source of affordable $$ that it controls
- These local projects have all received HOME funding: Brigham House, 1060 Belmont Street, Coolidge School Apartments, Marshall Place, St. Joseph Hall & the Quimby Street Condos

Marshall Place

WestMetro funding structure

Brigham House

- Each community gets a yearly admin budget; ours is about $10,000
- There is a “use it or lose it” project & program budget for each community; this year, ours is about $102,000
- When you can’t use the project/program money, it goes back to a “consolidated pool” open to projects from any community
- Communities can also retain & use money that comes back as program income; we have $119,000 left in this pot

Pool and CHDO competitions

- The Consortium issues RFPs each fall for the Consolidated Pool and CHDO money
- This year, $138,000 is available in the pool & $248,000 for CHDOs
- Watertown projects have periodically received $$ from the pool; in 2022, about $224,000 went to St. Joseph Hall's elevator replacement
- The CHDO money goes to Metro West Collaborative to support its operation in our region

St. Joseph Hall

HOME administration

- The Consortium submits a 5-year consolidated plan & yearly plans for HUD approval
- There is also a yearly report on past activities
- HOME projects are monitored by staff for compliance with income eligibility & maximum rents
- There are three HOME income tiers; here are last year’s numbers for a household of 4 persons:

--30% of AMI: $42,050

--50% of AMI: $70,100

--60% of AMI: $84,120

- The max rent for LOW was $1,577 and HIGH $2,023

Apartments at Coolidge School

Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing 2021-2025

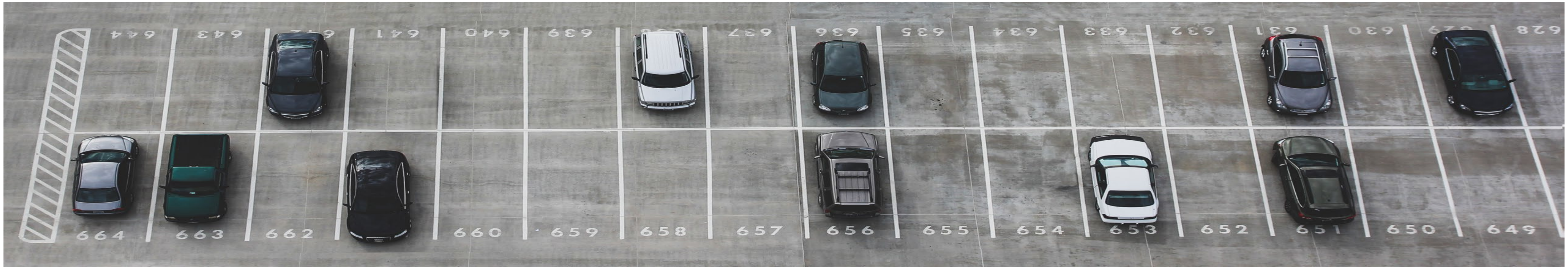
- The Consortium issued its fair housing report in 2021, identifying barriers to fair housing in the region and priorities for the next five years

- Regional barriers include opposition to multifamily housing & zoning/permitting requirements for such housing, weak or no inclusionary requirements, and (for discrimination in the private market) a “it doesn’t happen here” attitude

- The recommendations included regional and local actions, including:
  --public education on fair housing
  --increased diversity of local boards
  --review of zoning/permitting that discourages multifamily
  --focus on discrimination in the private market

Parking Utilization Study

- As a first step to reduce barriers to multifamily housing, the Consortium partnered with MAPC to conduct a study of parking utilization in multifamily developments built since 2000
- The study report, issued this summer, found that only 61% of parking spaces were utilized overnight
- The three key variables were parking supply (more spaces, more demand), proximity to transit & jobs (more proximity, less demand), & affordable units (more affordable units, less demand)
- 17 Watertown sites were studied, with a 62% utilization rate & demand at 1 space/unit



Testing private discrimination

- The Consortium has engaged Suffolk University Law School's Housing Discrimination Testing Program to test private conduct in the region
- Testers are independent contractors who assume a role and, without intent to rent, pose as renters for the purpose of collecting evidence of housing practices.
- A pair of testers will independently contact the housing provider. They will be as similar as possible, except that one will represent a protected class (e.g., member of a minority or a voucher holder)

Qualified Renters Need Not Apply Report (2020)

HOME-ARP Program

- The 2021 American Rescue Plan law created a one-time HOME funding program for particularly vulnerable populations; the Consortium has $5.4 million to spend
- As required, the Consortium performed a data-driven analysis to propose a HOME-ARP allocation plan approved by HUD this summer
- The plan allocates funding this way:

--About half to affordable rental production targeted to vulnerable populations (e.g., homeless or at risk of homelessness)

--Lesser $$ to creation of non-congregate shelters (18%), supportive services (14%) & rental assistance (6%)

- The next step is for the Consortium to issue RFPs to commit its HOME-ARP money to specific projects in each allocation category