

Watertown Housing Partnership
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, June 17, 2014
3rd Floor Planning Office

Attendees

Fred Reynolds, Chair

Cliff Cook, Member

David Leon, Member

Judge Paul Menton, Member

Brian Costello, Member, Director, Watertown
Housing Authority

Andrea Adams, DCDP Senior Planner

Gideon Schreiber, DCDP Senior Planner

Tony Palomba, Town Councilor at Large

I. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Minutes from Special Meeting on 3/25/14: Mr. Leon moved to approve the draft Minutes as presented. Mr. Menton seconded, and the Minutes were unanimously approved.

Minutes from Meeting on 5/20/14: Mr. Leon moved to approve the draft Minutes as presented. Mr. Menton seconded, and the Minutes were unanimously approved.

II. Schedule of Adoption of Recommended Changes to Section 5.07 of Zoning Ordinance

Ms. Adams noted that at the 5/20/14 meeting, the Watertown Housing Partnership (WHP) had discussed changes to Section 5.07 of Watertown's Zoning Ordinance. She noted the key changes were increasing the affordable percentage from 10% to 12.5% and changing the unit sizes to those required by the Department of Housing and Community Development. Ms. Adams said that DCPD staff recommended that the proposed text amendment be brought before the Planning Board at its next available meeting on July 9, 2014 under *Other Business*. She noted this would allow the Planning Board to review and comment on the proposed text amendment. It would also allow the WHP to review any changes the Planning Board might make at the WHP's meeting on July 15, 2014.

Mr. Schreiber noted the next step would be to take the proposed text amendment to the Town Council for first reading.

Mr. Leon asked when the proposed text amendments would take effect?

Mr. Schreiber said it would be based on the formal Planning Board hearing.

Next Steps: The WHP members asked DCDP staff to send out a schedule for taking the proposed text amendment to adoption. They also asked for a copy of the Planning Board report to the Town Council.

III. Tenant Based Rental Assistance: Security Deposit Program

Ms. Adams discussed the findings of her research into establishing a security deposit assistance program using HOME funds. She said the nearest similar program of any size was in Auburn, Maine. Ms. Adams noted that this program has a detailed application process, so that potential recipients' income eligibility is vetted. Ms. Adams also noted she had contacted the Mashpee Housing Authority and the Town of Yarmouth on Cape Cod. She said these entities have rental assistance programs using Community Preservation Act funds or other resources not coming from the HOME program. Ms. Adams said this allowed Mashpee and Yarmouth to design programs which do not have to follow the HOME requirements, and include other components such as credit counseling.

The WHP discussed the outlines of such a program. Should it be eligible to potential tenants in units created by Watertown's Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance? If HOME funds are being used, then Section 8 recipients would not be eligible as it would be "double dipping" in terms of Federal housing assistance. Issue of tracking the security deposit payments: Make grants, not loans.

Mr. Costello noted that the Watertown Housing Authority contracts out the Health Quality and Safety (HQS) inspections at a set rate per unit. Approximately \$40 per inspection per unit. He also noted that the more complicated part of the inspection is the follow up in the cases where a unit fails an inspection.

Mr. Schreiber suggested that the DCDP staff could partner with other Town staff, such as possibly the Zoning Enforcement Officer or the Health Department staff, to perform the required HQS inspections.

Mr. Reynolds, Chair, said another concern would be if the DCDP staff had the capacity to monitor the wait list and pre-qualify potential recipients, based on the staff's other work doing development reviews, etc. He also questioned whether landlords would participate, and if so, to what extent?

Next Steps: The WHP directed DCDP staff to try to "road test" the concept, to see how much effort and time would be involved in developing an application, allotting time for a mock inspection, so that the WHP could better understand the implications of establishing a tenant based security deposit program.

IV. Project Updates

Ms. Adams distributed a sheet showing projects submitted for review by the Planning Board and decision by the Zoning Board of Appeals for the July timeframe.

Mr. Schreiber noted that the 202-204 Arsenal Street/58 Irving Street project had altered the Eastern façade facing the Doble property so as to create a notch in the building by removing some residential units. He noted the removal of the units did not affect the placement of any of the units designated as affordable or accessible by WHP review. He noted the removal of the units would create more light in hallways that had previously been enclosed. He noted with the creation of the notch, the total number of residential units proposed decreased from 297 to 296, which still resulted in a requirement for 30 affordable units (10% of 296 = 29.6). He also suggested that there was another mixed use residential/commercial project, Elan/Greystar which would be coming before Site Plan Review in the near future, and would therefore need review/comment by the WHP.

V. Accessory Apartments Discussion

Ms. Adams noted that the text quoted on the Agenda was drawn from Watertown's approved Housing Production Plan.

Councilor Palomba said he had asked for a discussion of this Agenda item based on an interaction with a constituent, and questioned whether or not there was a way to make existing but perhaps non-conforming accessory apartments conforming?

Mr. Reynolds acknowledged Councilor Palomba's concern, but suggested a key issue was would allowing accessory apartments create more non-conformity by creating the potential for two-family dwellings in areas zoned for single family? He suggested the DCPD staff research what other Town do in such cases, citing the Town of Lincoln, MA as an example.

Ms. Adams noted her prior experience in Barnstable County, MA and suggested an issue to be discussed would be allowing landlords a mechanism to legalize non-conforming accessory apartments, but to do so in part by requiring that the unit become affordable in perpetuity.

Mr. Leon asked what might be the impact to Watertown of such a program. How many accessory apartments existed as part of its housing stock?

Councilor Palomba noted that when the zoning changed, thereby no longer allowing accessory apartments, landlords with existing apartments were provided with a grace period, so as to allow them to legalize the apartment.

Mr. Cook said the WHP should also consider the other positive aspects of accessory apartments, in that they can allow older residents to age in place.

The WHP discussed various issues, including if the units should be made affordable, was there a way to keep them on the Subsidized Housing Inventory? Should there be a deed restriction? Is that too burdensome on potential sales? Should there be a licensing mechanism that is periodically renewed? Should the units, if allowed, be restricted to family members only?

Next Steps: The WHP directed DCPD staff to try to answer some of the questions posed by the discussion and report back.

VI. Other Business

Ms. Adams noted that the next regularly scheduled WHP meeting was on Tuesday, July 15, 2014. She noted that this was also a Town Council meeting date, and that it was her understanding that other Town Boards and Committees did not meet on dates/times when the Town Council met, so as to allow Council Members to attend the other Board and Committee meetings. Based on this, she suggested the WHP consider adjusting the time or date of its next meeting.

The WHP decided to hold its next meeting on July 15, 2014, but to limit the meeting's duration to one hour, 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM.

VII. Adjourn

Mr. Reynolds asked for any other business. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Costello moved to adjourn the meeting, and Mr. Leon seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Meeting adjourned at 7:45 PM.