

**Watertown Housing Partnership
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, December 10, 2015
Special Meeting
Watertown Administration Building**

Members In Attendance

Fred Reynolds (Chair), Cliff Cook, Brian Costello (Watertown Housing Authority), Judge Paul Menton, David Leon, Steve Magoon (Director/Assistant Town Manager), and Andrea Adams (Senior Planner, Department of Community Development and Planning)

I. Approval of Meeting Minutes: Draft October 21, 2015 (Special Meeting)

Mr. Reynolds asked for a motion to approve the draft Minutes as presented. Mr. Costello moved to approve the draft Minutes as presented. Mr. Cook seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

II. Regional Mixed Use Zoning District Discussion

Mr. Leon thanked the Watertown Housing Partnership (Partnership) for their willingness to hold a special meeting to discuss the potential for adjusting the Town's affordable housing set-aside percentage in the proposed new Regional Mixed Use District (RMUD). Mr. Leon distributed a copy of suggested additional language to be included in the proposed Text Amendment, which would raise the affordable housing set aside in the RMUD to 15%.

Judge Menton asked which projects in the RMUD the increased set aside would apply to?

Director Magoon noted it would only apply to parcels or assemblages of parcels of two or more acres, as it would only apply in the case of a Master Plan Special Permit, and to have one you need the other.

Mr. Leon suggested it was appropriate for the Partnership to recommend to the Town Council that the set aside be increased in the RUMD because it was created from Industrial Zones (I-1 and I-2) where residential uses are currently not allowed. He noted the increase would also be consistent with Watertown's recently adopted Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Adams provided the Partnership with a copy of the draft RMUD district map, and the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Vision Map, to aid their discussions.

Mr. Leon suggested that the percentage set aside of affordable units should be increased, in recognition of the special status of the RMUD. He suggested doing so would also be consistent with Watertown's adopted Housing Production Plan. He noted that the percentage increase in affordable units between the current 12.5% set aside and 15% on a 250 unit project was nominal.

Mr. Cook agreed, noting that Cambridge, where he works, is seeing a large increase in high-end rentals or condominium developments, which exacerbates the need for affordable housing. He also suggested that developers want certainty in the regulations.

Director Magoon said there may be no significant increase in burdening a developer when considering larger residential or mixed use projects and in increase to 15%, but he suggested what was special enough about the RMUD to warrant singling out this zoning district versus other areas of Watertown? What is the public purpose behind the proposed increased set aside? Hypothetically, one could argue that a fairer course of action, and one that would promote more affordable housing in Watertown would be to entertain an increase in the affordable housing set aside Town-wide. The difficulty there is

where is the line at which the Town's set aside might push a developer to consider a Comprehensive Permit (Chapter 40B) project?

Mr. Leon suggested that the RMUD is special, in that it will allow, if passed, residential development in a zoning district where none is allowed now (I-2).

Judge Menton suggested perhaps the Partnership should wait, and suggest another Town-wide increase in the set aside?

Mr. Reynolds suggested that long term, the Town could consider a two-tier system, at 12.5% set aside for smaller projects and a larger set aside for larger projects.

Mr. Leon suggested the Town was amenable to such ideas, as the Inclusionary Zoning currently allowed a smaller cash contribution for smaller projects.

Mr. Cook noted another key issue is that many people who need affordable housing are still priced out of the market even with the unit maximum set at 80% of Area Median Income. In terms of the RMUD, he suggested that as the RMUD is a mixed use district, and increasing the affordable set aside would increase the ability of people of all income to live in the district.

Mr. Costello agreed with Mr. Cook, noting that based on what's happening in Watertown and surrounding communities, setting rents or prices at 80% of Area Median Income is really starting to create "virtual" affordable housing. There are many people and families with incomes that are beginning to be too high for Public Housing, but are still too low, without assistance, for the Inclusionary Zoning affordable units.

Mr. Leon suggested his proposed Text Amendment would allow only units, no cash buy out.

Mr. Reynolds said the Partnership needed to be more strategic with this proposed Text Amendment. He suggested a more straightforward approach, so as to not overly complicate the issue. He acknowledged the local housing market, and the issues that Mr. Costello and other members have raised in this meeting may force the Department of Housing and Community Development to revisit the definition of "affordable housing."

Director Magoon suggested that 15% set aside only in one area of Watertown creates an un-level playing field between different developers and different projects that may be of the same type and size.

Mr. Leon suggested that his Text Amendment was only intended to increase the affordable housing set aside to 15%, and that if included in the RMUD, all other parts of the Inclusionary Zoning bylaw in Watertown would still apply.

Director Magoon asked how the Partnership would like to proceed?

Mr. Leon suggested that the Partnership send the Town Council a cover memo or letter explaining the proposed Text Amendment.

Director Magoon suggested the Department of Community Development and Planning could assist in the drafting of such a cover memo or letter.

Mr. Reynolds suggested that Mr. Leon could sign the memo or letter to the Town Council on behalf of the Partnership. He asked for a motion on Mr. Leon's proposed language.

Mr. Costello moved to recommend Mr. Leon's proposed RMUD Text Amendment language, increasing the affordable housing set aside in the RMUD from 12.5% to 15.0% be sent to the Town Council for their consideration. Mr. Cook seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

III. Other Business

Mr. Reynolds suggested that since the Partnership would not have another meeting until the New Year, he encouraged the Partnership members to take the time to consider ways to generate more affordable housing. He noted the list that Ms. Adams had generated, which included buy-downs, using Metro West Collaborative Development and Watertown Housing Authority to create units, and a potential de-leading of a unit.

Mr. Costello noted he was working with Jennifer Van Campen at Metro West Collaborative Development to convert 11 of the Housing Authority's 156 Section 8 Vouchers into Project Based vouchers. He said this would base the affordable units in Watertown. He noted that the Housing Authority can convert up to 20% of its Section 8 Vouchers into Project Based vouchers. Doing so means that the voucher remains in Watertown, whereas other Section 8 Vouchers "travel" with the recipient if they are forced to move out of Watertown to find suitable housing.

Ms. Adams noted the recent local election had changed some of the membership of the Town Council. As such, she suggested that it might be a good idea to have the Partnership update the Town Council in the New Year as to the Partnership's mission, its successes in creating affordable housing, and its plans for the coming year.

Adjourn

Mr. Reynolds asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

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

Meeting adjourned at 7:00 PM.