

WATERTOWN HOUSING AUTHORITY

(MA093)

MOVING TO WORK COHORT #5

MTW FLEXIBILITY II COHORT

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To Be Released By:

Mr. Michael Lara
Executive Director.

Watertown Housing Authority
55 Waverley Avenue
Watertown, MA 02472
Office: 617-923-3950

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MTW Flexibility Cohort II

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WATERTOWN HOUSING AUTHORITY

MTW Cohort #5; Flexibility Cohort II

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Watertown is a city in Middlesex County, Massachusetts, part of Greater Boston. The population was 35,329 in the 2020 census. Its neighborhoods include Bemis, Coolidge Square, East Watertown, Watertown Square, and the West End. Watertown was one of the first Massachusetts Bay Colony settlements organized by Puritan settlers in 1630. The city is home to the Perkins School for the Blind, the Armenian Library and Museum of America, and the historic Watertown Arsenal, which produced military armaments from 1816 through World War II. (From Wikipedia.)

The Watertown Housing Authority (WHA), from the Board of Commissioners, through the Housing Authority leadership, and throughout the staff is highly committed to this Application to participate in the MTW Cohort # 5 Demonstration Program, also described by HUD as MTW Flexibility II Cohort. (The concept of “Flexibility” is already being tested in a prior MTW Demonstration Program Cohort involving larger Housing Authorities.)

The previous Flexibility Cohort (Flexibility Cohort I) had a different impact on HUD and its PHAs as opposed to this Flexibility Cohort II, because there was a smaller number of much larger PHAs, so the research, outcomes and findings affected fewer but much larger PHAs.

Flexibility Cohort II, however, has the potential for a more dramatic impact throughout HUD Public Housing/HCV PHAs given that more than 80% of the approximately 3,500 PHAs nationwide fall within the Category of small to medium-sized Housing Authorities with fewer than 1,000 total Section 8 and Section 9 units. Consequently, understanding the significance of this Cohort makes it an exciting endeavor to provide the research, outcomes and findings for a dramatically larger proportion of HUD PHAs.

At the same time, however, it must be acknowledged that the range of Flexibility is more restricted in this Cohort in comparison to Flexibility Cohort I. Inevitably, large PHAs have tremendous flexibility with reference to staffing and financial resources. Small and medium-sized PHAs, however, have much more rigid constraints on their opportunities to promote Flexibility.

In the case of small to medium-sized Housing Authorities, there are many functions that cannot be dismissed in the management of a Housing Authority no matter what size. Accepting and approving applications for housing; certifying and recertifying tenants for housing; inspecting units; and all of the other basic responsibilities in operating a Housing Authority cannot be dismissed even with Regulatory Waivers.

As a high functioning PHA and as a highly creative PHA, the WHA relishes the opportunity to contribute to this body of knowledge.

MTW Plan-Part I

INTRODUCTION

Background: Moving to Work Demonstration Program and MTW Expansion

The Moving to Work (MTW) Demonstration Program allows PHAs to design and test innovative, locally designed housing and self-sufficiency strategies for low-income families by permitting PHAs to use assistance received under Sections 8 and 9 of the United States Housing Act of 1937, as amended, 42 U.S.C. 1437, et seq., (1937 Act) more flexibly and by allowing certain exemptions from existing public housing and HCV program rules, as approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The MTW Demonstration Program was originally authorized by Section 204 of the Omnibus Consolidated Rescissions and Appropriations Act of 1996, P.L. 104-134; 42 U.S.C. 1437f note (1996 MTW Statute). Section 239 of the Fiscal Year 2016 Appropriations Act, P.L. 114-113 (2016 MTW Expansion Statute), authorizes HUD to expand the MTW Demonstration Program by designating an additional 100 PHAs (hereafter, the “MTW Expansion”). The 2016 MTW Expansion Statute provides that PHAs selected as part of the MTW Expansion must be high performers, meet certain size and Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) requirements, and represent geographic diversity across the country. All PHAs selected as a part of the MTW Expansion must follow the selection notice for their applicable cohort. All PHAs selected as a part of the MTW Expansion must also follow the MTW Operations Notice, which governs the participation of all PHAs in the MTW Expansion, establishes program structure, details terms and conditions, and provides all available MTW waivers and associated activities.² Eligibility and selection criteria under this Notice are based on the requirements of the 1996 MTW Statute, the additional criteria in the 2016 MTW Expansion Statute, and other indicators that ensure qualified PHAs are selected. These criteria will also allow HUD to test important policy priorities of interest to the Department and the assisted housing community.

Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) with 1,000 or fewer combined units of public housing and Housing Choice Voucher (HCV)

units will be selected for the fifth cohort of the Moving to Work Expansion (MTW), which will test the overall effects of MTW Flexibility on a PHA and the residents it serves, with a particular focus on administrative efficiencies (MTW Flexibility II Cohort). Interested PHAs that meet the eligibility criteria established by HUD may submit an application package to HUD to be considered for MTW Status. If the number of qualifying applications exceeds the number of awards currently available for this Cohort, HUD will select Applications by lottery weighted on a geographical basis.

MTW Cohort #5; MTW Flexibility II Cohort

MTW Cohort #5 is an exceedingly important matter for study for HUD and housing in the United States. As indicated previously, almost 3,000 PHAs across the United States fit into the same-sized category as the WHA, so developing and applying flexible and innovative solutions to operating this large number of agencies could have a huge impact in the field of public Housing.

The MTW Flexibility II Cohort of the MTW Expansion will assess the overall effects of MTW flexibility on a PHA and the residents it serves, with emphasis on how/whether MTW PHAs seek to achieve administrative efficiencies through MTW. The MTW Flexibility II Cohort will consist of PHAs with 1,000 or fewer aggregate authorized public housing and HCV units.

PHAs seeking MTW designation in the MTW Flexibility II Cohort of the MTW Expansion will submit an MTW Plan and application package to HUD by the due date of December 8, 2023.

Upon receiving the MTW Plan and Application Packages, HUD will ensure that the MTW Plan and application packages are eligible and complete. If there are enough MTW Expansion slots available for all of the PHAs that were found to have submitted eligible and complete application packages, HUD will offer MTW designation under the MTW Flexibility II Cohort of the MTW Expansion to all of the eligible applicant PHAs. If there are more applicant PHAs with complete and eligible application packages than MTW Expansion slots available, HUD will conduct a lottery of all eligible and complete MTW Plan and application packages. Those applicant PHAs selected through the lottery will be offered MTW designation under the MTW Flexibility II Cohort of the MTW Expansion. If a lottery is conducted, the applicant PHAs not selected through the lottery will not receive MTW designation under the MTW Flexibility II Cohort of the MTW Expansion but may apply for any future opportunities to join MTW under which they are eligible. All PHAs that submit an MTW Plan and application package under this Notice will be notified of their status (selected, not selected, not eligible/no complete application) after selections have been made.

Inclusion of a program or initiative in the MTW Plan and application package does not constitute approval of the program or initiative. If selected and designated as an MTW PHA, the PHA must pursue approval of all programs and initiatives through

the MTW Supplement and all processes described in the MTW Operations Notice. This includes the approval of the waivers and associated activities in Appendix I of the MTW Operations Notice and the approval of any Agency-Specific Waivers and/or Cohort-Specific Waivers.

Watertown Housing Authority and MTW Cohort #5

WHA Vision and Mission

The Watertown Housing Authority's (WHA) Mission is to:

- Provide affordable, decent, safe, and sanitary housing through the maintenance of our existing units and the development of new units.
- To create an environment that enables residents to live responsibly and with dignity.
- To support residents to achieve self-sufficiency.
- To honor public commitments in a fiscal and ethically responsible manner.
- To create and maintain public confidence in the WHA's operations and staff.
- To ensure that the facilities owned and managed by the WHA are marketable in the community and are appealing to residents.
- To enable WHA staff to improve their performance through appropriate training and career development.
- To establish performance goals that meet or exceed industry standards.
- To assist the city, town, state, and federal governments in identifying and addressing housing needs

The WHA will use the additional resources and regulatory and budget flexibility that comes with MTW status to further improve the Public Housing and HCV Program, including facilitating increased resident services, housing development opportunities, and landlord involvement.

In order to accomplish this, the WHA is making substantial efforts and will continue to implement initiatives to improve technology, customer service and communication among staff, with residents and with HCV landlords.

In support of this, the WHA is applying to HUD for selection as a MTW Cohort #5 Housing Authority. The Watertown Housing Authority is uniquely positioned to work very effectively with HUD in this endeavor.

As a MTW Cohort #5 Housing Authority, Watertown Housing Authority will continue to enact policies and procedures that will build strong relationships with its residents and resident organizations, its local landlords, and staff members that will be cost effective, provide housing choice for qualifying tenants, and support tenants and their families in achieving self-sufficiency.

WHA's Plan for Implementing its MTW Demonstration Program

In implementing MTW Cohort #5, the Watertown Housing Authority will apply HUD's key principles for the expansion to: (1) Simplify, (2) Learn, and (3) Apply. As with all other PHAs, WHA has had to operate in an environment where intervening and having the resources have been nebulous. Working with HUD, its MTW advisers and with HUD's assigned Technical Assistance experts, the WHA will establish an ideal environment in encouraging and supporting its residents for a great housing experience, while at the same time developing and implementing Flexibilities that will allow the Housing Authority to operate more efficiently and effectively.

Watertown Housing Authority brings a unique and comprehensive perspective to the table. The WHA has worked hard on its relationships with its residents who live in both public and leased housing, its applicants, and its landlords.

Working hand-in-hand with HUD, the WHA will (2) Re-evaluate its staffing plan and Chart of Organization; (2) It will assess how better to work with its resident organizations and tenants; (3) It will assess how to develop better, more efficient and more effective relationships with its landlords; and (4) It will determine how best to target its resources, including staffing and financial resources to the greatest benefit of residents, staff and housing development possibilities.

As part of this process, the WHA will assess all applicable waivers and associated activities in Appendix I of the MTW Operations Notice and will work with HUD on the approval of any Agency-Specific Waivers and/or Cohort-Specific Waivers, selecting from the following list:

- Tenant Rent Policies - 1(i) and 1(j): Alternative Utility Allowance (PH); Alternative Utility Allowance (HCV);

- Tenant Rent Policies - 1(r) and 1(s): Elimination of Deduction(s) (PH); Elimination of Deduction(s) (HCV);
- Tenant Rent Policies - 1(t) and 1(u): Standard Deductions (PH); Standard Deductions (HCV);
- Reexaminations - 3(a) and 3(b): Alternative Reexamination Schedule for Households (PH); Alternative Reexamination Schedule for Households (HCV);
- Reexaminations - 3(c) and 3(d): Self-Certification of Assets (PH); Self-Certification of Assets (HCV);
- Housing Quality Standards (HQS) - 5(d): Alternative Inspection Schedules (HCV);
- Project-Based Voucher Program Flexibilities - 9(c): Elimination of PBV Selection Process for PHA-owned Projects Without Improvement, Development, or Replacement;
- Project-Based Voucher Program Flexibilities - 9(d): Alternative PBV Selection Process (HCV).

It is understood that the expression of interest in these MTW waivers and associated activities in this section will not be binding on the WHA should it receive MTW designation under the MTW Flexibility II Cohort of the MTW Expansion. The selection of MTW waivers and associated activities by the WHA is for informational purposes only and will not be a factor in selection of PHAs for the MTW Flexibility II Cohort.

The Watertown Housing Authority, Housing Team

As already indicated, the WHA has assembled an outstanding team perfectly suited to working with HUD to address the HUD MTW Cohort #5 demonstration Program.

The Team members who will be most involved in the implementation of the Moving to Work, Cohort #5 are:

Members of the Board of Commissioners

- Allen Gallagher – Chairman
- Cynthia Galligan – Vice Chairperson
- Thomas P. Beggan – Treasurer
- Shannon Lawn – Assistant Treasurer
- Patricia Santos – At Large Member

Mr. Michael Lara, Executive Director

After graduating from Purdue University, Michael began working with a chronically homeless population in Cincinnati before attending Suffolk University Law School in Boston. Since then, he's worked at several non-profit organizations in the Greater Boston region. Michael has been at Watertown Housing Authority for five years and is most proud of its new resident service department, the repositioning of the agency's federal assets, with a focus on upgrading its state public housing portfolio. The WHA is now investigating the potential of redeveloping its state public housing properties and allocating funds to construct a new group home for DDS/DMH participants on vacant land. Michael has also been on the NAHRO Board of Directors since 2020 and currently sits on the Housing, Legislative, and Affordable Housing Development/Redevelopment Committees.

Director of Operations: Kristen Monti

Kristen Monti has worked at the Watertown Housing Authority for over five years, serving in many departments throughout the Authority. Kristen currently is responsible for the management of a caseload that consists of 240 state-aided public housing family units, 276 state-aided public housing elderly units, and 23 special needs units. With her administrative team, Kristen monitors and manages the CHAMP waitlist to minimize vacancies while meeting criteria for the PMR and AUPs. Kristen leads

policy development and manages service contracts to enhance WHA's mission of providing affordable and safe housing for the residents of WHA.

Accounting Manager – Dianne Santiago

Dianne Santiago has been an employee of Watertown Housing Authority since July 2nd of 2018, where she started as the front office manager/tenant coordinator. Dianne was promoted to Accounting Manager on August 9th, 2021. She is currently a student at Southern New Hampshire University, where she is perusing a Bachelor of Science in Accounting. As the Accounting Manager, Dianne is responsible for directing internal and external financial reporting, accounts payable and receivable, payroll, general accounting, investment and cash management policies, fixed assets, inventory, budgets, and manages all employee on-boarding and benefit enrollment. She is also responsible for directing the agency's budgeting and financial performance measuring across all its business lines as well as agency wide.

Leased Housing Manager – Brittany Jancarik

After working in private property management for two years overseeing an affordable housing compliance team, Brittany Jancarik joined the Watertown Housing Authority in May of 2022 as its Leased Housing Manager. In this role, she is responsible for a portfolio of 210 Housing Choice Vouchers funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Some of her key duties, with the support of the Leased Housing Team, include managing the waiting lists for both the Housing Choice Voucher and Project-Based-Voucher sites, processing new admissions and lease-ups, and overseeing all aspects of ongoing case management, policy change, and compliance within the program.

Director of Resident Services – Olivia Fields

Olivia Fields is a Licensed Social Worker, who carries a bachelor's and master's degree in social work. Through her academic career and in her 5 years of professional work in the field, Olivia has managed to accrue nearly 15 years of work experience with

at risk populations ranging from newborn children to adolescents, families, older adults and folks struggling with substance use and housing stability. In her professional roles she has been able to gain a wealth of knowledge in areas of Homelessness, Housing stability, juvenile, probate and housing court matters; as well as substance use treatment, mental health challenges, and intimate partner violence. Her professional skills include advocacy, community outreach, collaboration, clinical therapeutic care, crisis management and program development. In working with clients in these varied roles she has been able to gain a strong sense of leadership, management and advocacy skills.

Leased Housing Clerk – Nalda Vigezzi

Since joining the Section 8 staff at Watertown Housing Authority in September 2022, Nalda has worked with many of the 200 plus families and individuals who have Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8). She is primarily involved in completing annual redeterminations for residents and reviewing income, assets, and expenses with them in accordance with housing policies and procedures. Prior to this, Nalda worked for many years with the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance in several local offices and in various positions including Assistant Director of DTA offices. She has also worked in public and private housing management agencies.

MTW Plan—Part II

a. Plan for Future Community/Resident Engagement

The WHA will continue to engage assisted households in its low- income and affordable housing programs, as well as the broader community and stakeholders, in the implementation and development of its local MTW program.

As WHA does in all of its programs, as a MTW Cohort# 5 designee, the WHA will continue with its entire engagement efforts with the local community, including outreach to racial and ethnic minorities, persons with limited English proficiency, persons with disabilities, families with children and groups representing such persons.

In addition, the WHA will work closely with landlords to build additional HCV opportunities for HCV residents.

b. PHA Operating and Inventory

Housing Programs

HCV Units

The WHA currently provides tenant-based rental assistance to 210 HCV families, 78 of which are Project-Based Vouchers, and 132 are HCVs. The number of households fluctuates throughout the year, as families are removed and added program due to new admissions, portability and termination. The Massachusetts Centralized Waiting List for the Housing Choice Voucher currently has 481,129 applicants; 660 of these applicants meet WHA's preference of living and/or working locally. The WHA currently has approximately 43 applicants on its E. Joyce Munger Project-Based waiting list. The wait list was last opened August 22, 2022, and received 38 applications by lottery. All applicants were placed on the wait list. The WHA currently has approximately 24 applicants on its St. Joseph's Hall Project-Based waiting list. The wait list was last opened February 27, 2023, and received 13 applicants by lottery. All applicants were placed on the wait list.

Conventional Federal Public Housing Units

The WHA currently has 566 Conventional State Public Housing Units.

State Public Housing in Massachusetts is administered by the Common Housing Application for Massachusetts Programs (CHAMP). CHAMP is not a numbered wait list but is instead based on priority. State-aided public housing includes low-income families, elderly, and handicapped housing in buildings owned by Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) throughout 240 cities and towns in Massachusetts.

c. Plan for Local MTW Program

Watertown Housing Authority's MTW Cohort #5 Application is taking place in the context of what the Housing Authority has systematically done over the years to make things work effectively with residents, landlords, and staff. The WHA looks forward to the opportunity to implement Regulatory Waivers and other activities that will allow the WHA to function more effectively, build in Flexibility and efficiencies to improve circumstances for residents, landlords and staff.

In addition to the HUD-identified activities to be approved, based on experience, the WHA will continue to implement improvements to its Landlord Relations including: Streamlining Operations through Technology, Education, Outreach and Communication.

To facilitate technological solutions, better customer service and better communications, WHA will consider implementing some of all of these following strategies:

- Ensuring utilization of its housing software system that supports the housing programs and the MTW Cohort #5 initiative;
- Consideration to developing a Landlord Portal providing access to all forms and documents;

- Direct Deposits;
- Real-time inspections;
- Tenants potentially moved in same day;
- Established Landlord Advisory Committee;
- Pictures of Units and amenities to help market rental units.

The WHA is fully compatible with HUD's Fair Housing and Civil Rights Initiatives

d. Proposed Use of MTW Funds

Watertown Housing Authority will use all resources and where appropriate, fungibility to enhance housing and program opportunities for its residents and will use the MTW Cohort #5 status as a way to provide top level housing resources in coordination with an expanded and satisfied array of opportunities for residents, landlords, staff and added housing opportunities.

Watertown Housing Authority will work with HUD identified Technical Assistance contractors to determine the best strategy with reference to Waivers and Safe Harbors. Along with the Waivers required in tandem with the Activities Watertown Housing Authority ends up selecting,

The fifth cohort of the MTW Expansion will evaluate Flexibility and efficiencies and their effect on Housing Authority operations.

e. Application Tasks and Preparations

1. **Application Deadline:** The deadline for submitting the MTW Plan and Application is midnight, December 8, 2023.

The Application Process is accomplished by the Executive Director sending an e-mail to HUD to "John Concannon; Director,

Moving to Work Demonstration Program”; e-mail: MTWFlexibilityII@hud.gov with the finished MTW Plan and Application package attached to the e-mail as a PDF. The Subject Line should be titled: “MTW Expansion MTW Flexibility II Cohort – Application Package” and in the body of the e-mail, should include the name and number of the PHA and relevant contact information. We will at our end prepare the MTW Plan and Application Package so that all that the Executive Director needs to do is to set up the e-mail as instructed above and send the e-mail.

2. **Deadline for Posting the Draft MTW Plan:** The “Draft MTW Plan” must be provided publicly 30 days prior to submitting the MTW Plan to HUD in the Application; so the absolute deadline for publishing the “Draft MTW Plan” is November 8, 2023. (The final MTW Plan is finalized after the Board Meeting, based on input received and adopted up to that point.)

Preparing the MTW Plan will be an iterative process between TCI and the Housing Authority. (1) We will provide the first draft by next Friday. (2) The Housing Authority should amend the Draft by filling in details about the ways in which the Housing Authority wants to apply Work Flexibility and Administrative Efficiencies. (3) TCI will then rework the Draft to meet the formatting requirements required by HUD. (4) The Housing Authority should collect comments and input from the Board and others to further amend the Draft. (5) TCI will then prepare the final version of the MTW Plan for submission to HUD.

3. **Board of Commissioners’ Meeting:** The ideal timing for presenting the “Draft MTW Plan” to the Board of Commissioners and for the Board to pass the mandatory Resolution in support of the Plan and Application is in the November Board Meeting. (The Board Meeting could be any time up until December 8th, as long as the Resolution and application documents can still be signed at that point.)
4. **Preparing the Board of Commissioners:** It is a good idea to have the Plan and Application on the Agenda in the October Board Meeting, so that the Board and Public can be prepared for the November Meeting.
5. **The Board Meeting** must be at least 15 days following the Public Hearing.

6. **Public Hearing**: The Public Hearing should be scheduled as soon as possible. The purpose of the Public Hearing is to explain the process to all interested parties, and to share a preliminary Draft of the MTW Plan for comment and questions. HUD does not state any requirements for the scheduling or Notice for the Public Hearing. The Housing Authority should use its own requirements or normal practice for providing Notice for the Meeting. Attendance and Minutes must be available for the Public Hearing to be included in the Application Package. The very last date that the Public Hearing can be scheduled is November 23rd, as long as the Board Meeting is December 8th, but the Public Hearing should be scheduled much earlier.

7. **Resident Meeting(s)**: Although not required, the Housing Authority should meet with the RAB or with Resident Officers as soon as feasible to brief them about the MTW process, Plan and Application Package. Attendance and Minutes must be available for the Public Hearing to be included in the Application Package.