

WATCH's History in relation to Affordable Housing and Tenant Advocacy

1988

- WATCH assists in delaying the mass eviction and then helps to relocate 235 evicted tenants at Golden Maple Lodge.
- WATCH researches local banks to see if they are giving loans to residents in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods as required by the Community Reinvestment ACT (CRA) and enlists the FDIC to order Sterling bank to comply with the Act.

1991

- WATCH advocates for the City Council to pass the Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance to require developments meeting certain criteria to include affordable units or contribute a fee to the City's Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

1992

- WATCH highlights affordable housing needs in Waltham with the South Waltham initiative. Works with Tenants United for Fair Housing to pressure Federal Savings Bank to fix up distressed properties.

1993

- WATCH fights to get affordable housing added to the plans to develop the former Met State Hospital.
- WATCH develops its first affordable housing project at 18 Myrtle Street.

1995

- WATCH launches its Waltham Involves Neighbors/ Waltham Improves Neighborhoods initiative which would result, over the next four years, in five properties being renovated to create eleven more units of affordable housing. With these projects, WATCH mobilizes over \$5.2 million in investment in Waltham neighborhoods.
- WATCH organizes citizen demands around Cronin's Landing development.

1997

- WATCH supports creation of the Housing Department in City Hall.
- WATCH organizes tenants at 144 Moody Street to form a tenants association to negotiate new leases, moderate rent increases, and ensure building repairs.

1998

- WATCH organizes residents at Northgate Heights to mitigate rent increase and provide a moving allowance for tenants facing a \$350/month rent increase.

1999 -2000

- WATCH succeeds in securing the addition of a line item for affordable housing in the City budget.
- WATCH wins improvements to strengthen Waltham's Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance.
- WATCH renovates and sells a three-bedroom home at 52-54 Charles Street and builds three two-family homes in an abandoned lot across the street. All are sold to low-income families.

2001-2003

- WATCH organizes residents of Charles/Fenton Neighborhoods to address safety concerns.
- WATCH organizes tenants at Gardencrest Apartments to form a tenant organization that reaches an agreement with owners to cap rent increases at no more than 5% for four years.

2004-2005

- WATCH buys the Young Building on the corner of Moody and Maple Streets, space for three offices and seven affordable housing units.
- WATCH develops four homes in Belmont; three are affordable to low-income first time home buyers.
- With partners Waltham Land Trust and the League of Women Voters, WATCH forms the Fernald Working Group to involve the community in advancing a smart growth reuse plan for the Fernald State School site.
- WATCH partners with Waltham Land Trust to win passage of the Community Preservation Act.

2006

- WATCH's Affordable Housing Committee focuses efforts to turn surplus school buildings into affordable housing, especially the Banks School.

2007

- WATCH organizes tenants at Prospect Hill Terrace to successfully advocate for the Housing Authority to convert two vacant apartments into a community center. WATCH helps form tenant associations at Prospect Hill Terrace and Chesterbrook Gardens.
- WATCH forms the Housing Clinic to provide free one-on-one assistance at a twice-weekly walk-in clinic. Tenants get help applying for food stamps, public housing, and affordable housing lotteries; learn their rights in an eviction; and receive referrals for legal support.

2008

- WATCH organizes public housing tenants to obtain agreement with the Mayor to appoint an active tenant to the Housing Authority Board.

2010

- With the depressed housing market, the WATCH Board of Directors makes a strategic decision to move from developing housing to organizing for affordable housing. WATCH develops the “Community Housing Principles of Affordable Housing,” as a guiding document.
- WATCH organizes Waltham voters to vote against a state-wide ballot measure that would eliminate the Massachusetts Affordable Housing Law.
- Along with Watertown Community Housing, Belmont Housing Trust, and Lexington Housing Partnership, WATCH forms Metro West Collaborative Development (MWCD) to create affordable housing in the region, in collaboration with the community and local CDCs.

2011

- WATCH’s organizing at Whelan Public Housing Development results in a vote for a new tenants association, allowing tenants to have a formal voice in the Waltham Housing Authority.

2014

- WATCH introduces a \$3 million proposal for a local rental voucher program to the Waltham Community Preservation Committee.

2016

- WATCH wins passage of a \$2 million local rental voucher program, administered by the Waltham Housing Authority.

2017

- WATCH hires a Housing Clinic Coordinator and expands to assist 500 low-income households a year with resources, help with applications, referrals, and advocacy.
- WATCH begins a three-year contract with the Waltham Housing Authority to support lease compliance and financial independency goals for local voucher recipients.

2018

- Waltham Public Schools initiates an annual contract with WATCH to support at-risk and homeless students and their families.
- WATCH submits a proposal to the CPC for a landlord incentive bill (keeping rents affordable), which is studied by a subcommittee and tabled for the time being.

2019

- WATCH advocates for the successful passage of an increase in the Inclusionary Zoning Law from 10% to 15%, with the additional 5% serving residents at 50% Area Median Income.
- WATCH receives approval of a CPC proposal to spend \$30,000 on a feasibility study to determine if the vacant Waltham Armory is a suitable site for affordable housing.

Affordable Housing Development

WATCH has developed 34 units of affordable housing, with 20-40 year deed restrictions, through the federal HOME program.

Examples of WATCH projects proposed in the past that did not move forward due to lack of support:

- WATCH worked hand-in-hand with the City Council to move an RFP forward to develop the **Banks School** for affordable housing. When WATCH was the sole bidder interested in responding to the RFP, WATCH’s bid was rejected and the city proceeded to develop the property itself.
- WATCH attempted to buy the privately owned **Gardencrest** development when it came up for sale. WATCH was the high bidder but was rejected by the owners. The new corporate owners began a process of upgrading the apartments and pricing out the low-income residents.
- WATCH proposed to develop the Waltham **Armory** as affordable housing and was opposed by the Veterans’ community that wanted a memorial or museum there. The property was sold under the DCAMM fast-track auction policy to a developer who has left it vacant for some 15 years.
- WATCH proposed a 34-unit project at **462 Main Street**. After initial concern by neighbors and a protracted campaign, WATCH won over community residents. The City of Waltham did not sign off on WATCH’s DHCD funding request.

Historically the City of Waltham supported WATCH projects that were small, scattered-site, one- to four-family projects. Six units, located in three two-family homes, is WATCH’s largest ever project. This mode became unworkable in the framework of affordable housing funding. In 2010, WATCH’s Board of Directors decided to no longer develop affordable housing directly, but to rely on regional partners such as MetroWest Collaborative Development. Unfortunately, MetroWest CD projects have focused on other communities in our region, where the climate for developing affordable housing is more welcoming. MetroWest Collaborative Development is now looking at the Waltham Armory and other possible affordable housing projects in Waltham.