

# 2025 Watertown City Council Questionnaire



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### **Q1: What is your vision for housing in Watertown?**

#### ***Answer***

My vision for housing in Watertown is that every resident — whether a lifelong homeowner, a renter just starting out, or a senior looking to downsize — has options that allow them to stay and thrive here. We need a mix of housing types and price points, balanced growth that respects neighborhood character, and policies that keep Watertown inclusive and livable for the long term. With commercial development slowing, the city should encourage new housing development to address the shortage and generate new tax revenues.

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## Q2: Permit Streamlining for Homeowners.

Watertown's current residential zoning districts were adopted in 1964, after most homes in town were built, and have only become more restrictive in the last 60 years. As a result, most homes require a discretionary special permit finding from the Zoning Board of Appeals to make additions or adjustments to a home, adding time delays and extra costs to residents adapting their homes to meet their needs.

**How would you change the zoning ordinance to make it easier for homeowners to change their homes so they can stay in town?**

### *Answer*

I would support a comprehensive zoning update that:

- Expands what can be built **by right** (for example, modest additions and dormers, even when expanding existing non-conforming conditions).
- Establishes **clear, objective standards** to reduce reliance on discretionary special permits. Limits ZBA review for single and two family homes to projects requesting variances.
- Creates a **fast-track (over-the-counter) building permit review** for common projects like porches, kitchens, or small zoning-compliant additions.
- Revises outdated rules such as the **2.5-story cap** that restricts the top floor in all our low density residential districts to only 50% of the floor area and the fact that basements contribute to FAR in our single family residential zones. These kinds of rules prevent families from adding additional living space, even when they're staying within the existing building envelope.
- Revise current ADU ordinances to increase the allowable size of ADUs (within reason.) For example, my family created a basement unit for my in-laws that allowed use to live intergenerationally with my in-laws. Their unit wouldn't be allowed by the current ADU ordinance because it would be slightly too large. Because we live in a Two Family zone, we were able to configure a home that works very well for our family but it wouldn't currently be allowed in other zoning districts.

These changes would save families time and money, unlock usable living space in existing v, and help residents age in place rather than being forced to leave Watertown because their home no longer fits their needs.

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## Q3: Neighborhood Infill Development.

In the 2023 Comprehensive Plan, the city set out a number of housing goals including goal 5C: *Maintain and expand a range of housing types throughout Watertown, such as micro-units, family-size units, and supportive housing. Consider necessary zoning changes to allow more housing types.*

5C1. *Explore allowing accessory dwelling units (ADU) in one- and two-family neighborhoods (Enacted by the Legislature in 2024)*

5C2. *Promote small- to mid-scale infill housing development (“missing middle”) like two- and three-family housing and small apartment buildings.*

**What examples of “missing middle” infill housing do you think would be appropriate to meet goal 5C2 in neighborhoods outside of Watertown Square? For District Councilor candidates, please focus on the neighborhoods in your district.**

### Answer

Watertown’s Comprehensive Plan is right to call out the importance of “missing middle” housing — the kinds of homes that fit between single-family houses and large apartment blocks. These new units provide options for families, young professionals, and seniors who want to stay in town but need something other than a single-family home.

Incentivising the construction of “Missing Middle” housing also allows smaller developers to compete by building smaller, while still profitable, projects on smaller lots. This helps add variety in the scale and character of housing we are building and avoids the fate of all new units being built by large developers building mega-projects on multiple consolidated lots.

Examples that would be appropriate outside of Watertown Square include:

- **Two- and three-family homes** on appropriately sized lots, designed to look like larger single-family houses. *Minneapolis* did this citywide under its 2040 Plan, and it has helped expand housing choice without disrupting neighborhood character.
- **Townhouses and rowhouse-style homes** along corridors like Mount Auburn, North Beacon, or Arsenal Street. *Sacramento* recently adopted reforms to encourage this kind of gentle density in single-family zones.
- **Small courtyard or garden-style apartment buildings (6–12 units)** near transit or along wider streets. *Portland’s Residential Infill Project* legalized this scale of building citywide, showing how it can add homes while still feeling residential in character.
- **Adaptive reuse of older civic or commercial properties**, such as former schools or industrial buildings, into housing. Watertown has a strong tradition of this — the Arsenal has already been transformed successfully, and similar smaller-scale projects could expand our housing stock further. *Similar to Coolidge School in the East End and 5 Auburn St in Natick!*

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## Q4: Affordable Housing.

Several of our neighboring communities have adopted Affordable Housing Overlays (AHOs) to facilitate the construction of more deed-restricted affordable housing in their communities. The key elements of these AHOs have been 1) allowing multi-family deed-restricted affordable housing as a by-right use (with site plan review) across the city, 2) providing dimensional and parking relief for affordable developments, and 3) providing a defined and expedited permitting pathway to reduce red tape and uncertainty. In parallel, the Watertown Affordable Housing Trust is working with MAPC to design the specific incentives to increase the production of affordable housing in Watertown.

**In light of this AHO framework and the MAPC study, what specific steps would you take to make it easier to build deed-restricted affordable housing in Watertown?**

### Answer

Watertown needs to expand affordable housing opportunities, but we should do it in a way that reflects community input and is financially feasible. While Affordable Housing Overlays in neighboring cities offer some promising tools — like by-right approval, dimensional relief, and faster permitting — we should carefully evaluate how those tools would work here before adopting them wholesale. Importantly, Watertown has already adopted inclusionary zoning, which has produced valuable affordable units within mixed-income private developments. I am very interested in seeing the results of the current MAPC study, and I believe those findings should help determine if and how we move forward with an overlay.

For me, the priority is making sure that any project taking advantage of new incentives delivers **100% deed-restricted affordable housing**, not just token units in otherwise market-rate developments. In an expensive market like Watertown has become, we need to maximize the number of affordable units that we produce given the scarcity of developable sites. In the near term, I would:

- Work with the Affordable Housing Trust and MAPC to identify incentives that actually make affordable projects viable in Watertown.
- Streamline approvals so mission-driven developers aren't discouraged by red tape.
- Explore using **city-owned parcels** for affordable housing, where we can set the terms and ensure long-term affordability.
- Keep community engagement central, so residents understand and support these projects as part of strengthening Watertown.

This balanced approach ensures that when we do expand affordable housing, we're making the most of limited land and public resources by focusing on developments that are fully affordable.

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## **Q5. Resident Housing Services.**

As stated by HMA in Watertown's HHS Assessment report, one community-based group leader urged the city to prioritize "a leadership position or department that would be responsible for championing, coordinating, and advancing housing services for Watertown residents and addressing the impacts of housing insecurity..."

**With economic uncertainty on the horizon, what would you do with existing resources to improve housing services in Watertown?**

**If budget allows, are there any new housing services you think the city should start providing to residents?**

### **Answer**

With economic uncertainty ahead, we need to make sure residents know where to turn for help. Now that Watertown has created a Human Services Department, I believe that department should take the lead in coordinating housing services — serving as the single point of contact for residents, connecting them to rental assistance, legal aid, or home repair programs, and making sure housing insecurity is addressed alongside other social service needs. At the same time, the city should establish public-private partnerships with non-profit human services agencies that have deep experience serving at-risk constituencies, so we can expand capacity and ensure residents get the support they need.

With existing resources, the department can improve coordination by:

- **Centralizing information** online and in multiple languages.
- **Strengthening partnerships** with local nonprofits that already provide housing services.
- **Proactive outreach** to seniors, renters, and immigrant families so they know where to turn.

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## Q6: Redevelopment of City Property in the Square

One of the main components of the Watertown Square Area Plan is redevelopment of municipal properties within the Square, including the parking lots behind CVS, the library, and City Hall as well as the old police station. The City Council serves as the redevelopment authority for this area. What are your goals as a redevelopment authority member? How do you balance and prioritize different potential projects such as parking garages, housing, retail, and parks/green space?

### Answer

The Watertown Square Area Plan is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine the civic heart of our city. I commend the City Manager, City Council, and Planning Board for their leadership in approving this plan. As a member of the redevelopment authority, my goal would be to ensure these municipal sites are used to strengthen Watertown's identity as a welcoming, walkable, and vibrant community.

I would prioritize:

- **Housing**, including affordable and mixed-income units, so more people can live near the Square's services and transit.
- **Public space and green space**, giving residents and families a reason to gather, linger, and build community.
- **Retail and cultural uses** that support small businesses and keep the Square lively beyond the workday.
- **Smart parking solutions**, such as structured parking that reduces surface lots and frees up land for better uses, while still meeting accessibility and business needs.

Balancing these priorities means broad community engagement, clear design standards, and a commitment to making sure redevelopment reflects both Watertown's values and its future needs. Done right, the Square can be a civic anchor — not just a place to pass through, but a destination that residents are proud of.