

## HOUSING COMMISSION

### TOWN OF ESSEX HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES Wednesday, April 6, 2022

**Housing Commission (HC):** Katie Ballard, Chair; Gabrielle Smith, Vice Chair; Mia Watson, Clerk; Mark Redmond; Michelle Teegarden;

**Administration and Staff:** Darren Schibler, Town Planner

#### **1. CALL TO ORDER AND AGENDA ADDITIONS / CHANGES**

**Ballard called the meeting to order at 3:02 PM.** Ballard acknowledged the difficulty of moving forward based on the separation of the Housing Commission that was decided by the Trustees and Selectboard. She intends to send the recording of the meeting to the Boards so that they are aware of the Commission's feelings on the matter.

#### **2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

There were no members of the public present.

#### **3. BUSINESS ITEMS**

##### **a. Approval of Minutes**

**Smith made a motion, seconded by Teegarden, to approve the minutes of March 3, 2022. The motion passed 5-0.**

##### **b. Village Separation Implications for Housing Commission**

Ballard reiterated to Housing Commission the Village Board of Trustees wants separate commissions for the future City of Essex Junction. Separate Housing Commissions means that we will lose much of the momentum and connections that we have spent the last two years building. The Housing Commission already needs to replace a member following the resignation of Alison Levy. Ballard commented that it is still not clear whether there will be opportunities to collaborate between municipalities.

Watson commented that although she agrees that there will be much lost in separation, it has always been difficult navigating multiple municipal processes and boards, as she encountered in her Inclusionary Zoning work. Separate Housing Commissions may allow for more streamlined, targeted work and a clearer set of priorities.

Smith noted that separation into two Commissions will lose much of the expertise and capacity that we have spent the last two years building. She suggested that we investigate whether we could expand the current Commission membership before

separation to build depth. She suggested that the Commission needs to devote its energy now in preparing to separate.

Ballard pointed out that there are still many process questions unanswered. It is not clear how we will separate out into two separate commissions, as the current charter does not require residency for all members. In addition, the staff support for the Commission has not been equal. Unless something changes, the Village Housing Commission will not have the same staff support as the Town in place.

Teegarden asked how can the Commission move forward with our initiatives while separation are in limbo. The financial impacts of separation will also make work difficult in the near future.

Redmond suggested that this type of planning was difficult over Teams and suggested an in-person group planning meeting devoted to separation. Ballard agreed that a longer meeting would be beneficial.

She suggested that it is unlikely that the Housing Commission will receive more specific guidance from the Selectboard and Board of Trustees in the near future. She stated that the Commission has an opportunity now to decide its own future and has a responsibility to do everything we can for Essex town and village residents in helping them access safe and decent housing.

Commissioners all agreed to a group planning session in person within the next two months. Schibler drafted a list of questions that the Housing Commission will discuss during the planning meeting. Ballard and Schibler will send a poll to Commissioners to find a time that all can attend.

**c. Inclusionary Zoning – Developer Forum Debrief**

Not discussed due to lack of time.

**d. Community Forum Planning / Logistics**

Not discussed due to lack of time.

**e. Adaptive Reuse and Affordable Housing – Robin**

Not discussed due to lack of time.

**f. Other Business**

Ballard reminded Commission that she will be giving a talk in April with the Essex Rotary to discuss housing in Essex and possible collaboration. Watson offered to help update the flyer made for the housing forum with legislators this past fall, if needed.

**g. Adjourn**

**Ballard called meeting to close at 4:27 pm.**

Minutes prepared and submitted by Mia Watson, Clerk. Minutes approved April 20, 2022.