

HOUSING COMMISSION

TOWN OF ESSEX SPECIAL HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES Thursday, May 12, 2022

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

Administration and Staff: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Brad Luck, Interim Village Manager; Darren Schibler, Town Planner; Robin Pierce, Village Planner; Sharon Kelly, Zoning Administrator

Members of the Public: Ned Daly, Village Planning Commission, J. Percy

1. CALL TO ORDER AND AGENDA ADDITIONS / CHANGES

Ballard called the meeting to order at 1:07 PM.

Ballard asked the Housing Commission members what intentions should be for this special session, and how that should reflect the order of agenda items. Watson asked if the separation discussion topics under Business Items could be consolidated into a single business item to allow the minutes to reflect a more free-flowing discussion.

Ballard made a motion to consolidate the business items, seconded by Teegarden. There was no further discussion. The motion passed 6-0.

2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

There were no public comments shared from the members of the public.

3. BUSINESS ITEMS

- a. Separation discussion topics: Setting new policy, structure, and role for Town vs. City Housing Commission; Level of collaboration between Town and Village during and after the transition period; Staff support for the commission(s), during and after transition period; Commission membership during / after separation, possible membership expansion during transition; Member appointments by SB / Trustees during transition, including for current vacancy; Commission's work plan for the next year, effect of municipal budgets; Creation of bylaws for current and future Commission(s); Other information and questions for Selectboard and Trustees**

Ballard started the discussion with the topic of Commission Membership, the process of appointment, and whether the Commission should recommend adding interim commissioners before official separation. Interim Village Manager Brad Luck confirmed the no more joint Selectboard/Village Trustees meetings are scheduled,

37 and it may take several weeks' notice to schedule new joint meetings. However, the
38 Selectboard and Trustees may pass joint items separately at their individual
39 meetings, so that would not be an impediment to appointing new members

40 Taylor supported the item of adding new Commissioners now to get them familiar
41 with their roles before the separation. Redmond agreed. Taylor asked whether the
42 Housing Commission would need to decide now whether Commissioners would join
43 a Town or Village Commission. Schibler suggested that the Joint Commission be
44 temporarily expanded to allow for 5 members each for the Town and Village, with a
45 total interim membership of 10.

46 Luck asked if there was value in creating separate commissions immediately (on
47 7/1/22) and have them work jointly. Watson pointed out that this could create
48 immediate issues with quorum and submitting separate minutes. Schibler noted that
49 since the Housing Commission was set up as a joint body, it would need to be
50 dissolved and re-established as separate commissions. Smith remarked that there
51 seemed to be obvious downsides to the proposal without obvious benefits. She
52 suggested joint commissions can be cumbersome and that the Commission needed
53 more time to work as colleagues to prepare.

54 Ballard suggested that the Housing Commission consider the 10-member interim
55 solution proposed by Schibler. Although Commissioners may currently be appointed
56 at large, if new interim Commission membership was based on residency, that would
57 leave Ballard, Smith, and Watson in the seats reserved for the Village and
58 Redmond, Teegarden, and Taylor in the Town seats. Taylor is not a resident of
59 either municipality, but her workplace is in the Town. The seats would be reserved
60 for appointment by the separate municipalities, but would both still allow for non-
61 resident members. The new quorum would be 7. The Housing Commission would
62 need to recruit 4 new members, including the current open position to replace Alison
63 Levy. Commission members agreed to this approach.

64 Redmond proposed that with the expanded interim 10-person Commission, the
65 interim joint group should separate closer to the official municipal separation date.
66 Schibler suggested that the Commission stay together until 3-4 months ahead of
67 July 1, 2023, at which point it could ask the Boards to official separate and reappoint
68 the Commissioners around that time.

69 Ballard suggested proposing this plan in a letter to the Board of Commissioners and
70 Village Trustees. Duggan and Luck agreed, and Luck suggested that this could be
71 accomplished without needing a joint meeting from the Board of Commissioners and
72 Village Trustees to amend the charter.

73 Smith asked about a budget and staffing for the Commission's current and future
74 work. Duggan stated that the Housing Commission has no budget currently but can

75 use joint Community Development Department funding for now. Duggan was under
76 the impression that staffing was currently supposed to be joint with the Town and
77 Village. Ballard replied that the Commission had to date received most of its support
78 from Schibler and Owiso Makuku (before she left), including finalizing the agenda
79 and posting agenda and minutes. Schibler noted that the Town currently has more
80 staff capacity, which is something to think about going forward when staffing the new
81 City of Essex Junction. Luck stated that there would be a community development
82 office in the new City government, but no new appointments are currently planned.
83 Schibler suggested that the current staff could continue supporting the Commission
84 as usual through transition period.

85 Ballard next brought up the topic of bylaws needed for the current and future
86 Commissions. Duggan asked for clarification on what bylaws would be needed.
87 Schibler said that bylaws would have been needed to manage any new Commission
88 structure, however, since it will be joint there is no need to adjust bylaws until
89 separation. However, the Commission will need plan for joint meetings later on.

90 Ballard then asked about a workplan through March/April, 2023. Smith noted that
91 there had been previous discussions about the Housing Trust Fund (HTF) with the
92 Village Trustees, who were not very supportive in the short term due to tax issues
93 connected with funding the HTF. Duggan shared the Town perspective, that the
94 Selectboard was conducting strategic planning sessions for post-separation, and if
95 the Commission believes the HTF is important, they should continue to think about
96 it. Smith suggested that the Commission keeps it on its workplan, to be prepared
97 when it is possible to make a case for it. Teegarden noted that the landscape might
98 be different post-separation, at which time the City might be more amenable
99 considering the proposal.

100 Watson shared the state of the Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) working group. She
101 suggested that separation should not overly complicate the process. IZ would have
102 had to have been separately adopted by the Village and Town Planning
103 Commissions regardless of separation, and there had been a growing recognition
104 within that working group that each municipality will have unique needs. Work will go
105 forward in both the Town and the Village, although the Village will take priority as the
106 Village Planning Commission has indicated greater readiness to move forward. The
107 biggest unknown factors will be staffing efforts the working group and moving the
108 policy forward if it is not completed before separation.

109 Ballard suggested that outreach efforts to both communities stay on the workplan,
110 although the Commission may wish to target efforts more closely based on
111 committee members residency.

112 Duggan left the meeting at 2:07 PM.

113 Luck suggested that the Commission make clear, complete recommendations to the
114 Board of Commissioners and Village Trustees about how they want the Commission
115 to be structured and conduct work in the interim period. Luck left at 2:08.

116 Ballard suggested a 5-minute break for the meeting, which was agreed to. The
117 meeting resumed at 2:16.

118 Smith suggested that the Commission work until 3:00 PM, and cancel the next
119 Wednesday, May 8th. Ballard agreed. She suggested by next meeting the
120 Commission will have a letter for the Trustees and Selectboard outlining the
121 proposed interim period. The letter will include the need for adequate staff support,
122 to ensure that needs of Commission can be met. Smith asked the letter to include
123 the eventual goal to re-establish the separate Housing Commissions as seven-
124 member bodies. Ballard agreed.

125 Watson asked how the recruitment for the current vacancy is going. Schibler stated
126 that there had not been many candidates thus far, but staff were waiting on this
127 meeting to know more. Watson said that Commission needed to be more intentional
128 and aggressive in recruitment to adequately staff all the new vacancies. Smith
129 suggested that the Commission trying to bring in more renters and potentially New
130 Americans. Ballard suggested reaching out to Essex's Equity workgroup. Schibler
131 agreed to add recruitment discussion to agenda for next meeting.

132 Teegarden asked if there was a need to update Commissioner position descriptions.
133 Schibler said there was no obvious reason to change them now. Commissioners
134 agreed.

135 Taylor asked whether current 3-year terms would continue. Schibler said that the
136 Town is reconsidering applicants at the end of the terms and will conduct interviews.
137 He was not sure about the City's plans.

138 Ballard again brought up workplans, and asked how if Commissioners had any
139 additional thoughts. Smith brought up the idea of the rental registry, which had been
140 previously considered but set aside. Schibler shared that the Legislature had been
141 hoping to pass a comprehensive rental registry for the state. While they are poised
142 to pass addition funding for code enforcement, they stripped a registry requirement
143 to avoid a veto from the Governor. Schibler stated that the provision was unlikely to
144 be brought forward in the near future after being rejected twice. Watson stated that
145 the registry might have a future in the City as part of a code enforcement ordinance.
146 While it would be technically feasible, it would need buy-in from the City.
147 Commissioners discussed possible incentives to encourage landlord participation.

150 Taylor shared that the Outreach working group had so far not had much engagement
151 from landlords. She suggested that a more formal approach might be required, and that
152 the Commission might consider connecting directly with renters to learn about their
153 needs.

154 Ballard stated that by the next meeting on June 1st, she would work with staff to have a
155 draft letter for the Trustees and Selectboard. At the next meeting the Commission will
156 review the workplan and recruitment plan.

157

158 **2. Adjourn**

159 **Ballard called meeting to close at 3:00 PM.**

160

161 Minutes prepared and submitted by Mia Watson, Clerk.

162 Minutes approved June 1, 2022.