

HOUSING COMMISSION

TOWN OF ESSEX HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES Wednesday, July 20, 2022

Housing Commission (HC): Katie Ballard, Chair; Gabrielle Smith, Vice Chair; Mia Watson, Clerk; Mark Redmond; Ned Daly, Ta-Tanisha Redditta, Rupesh Asher

Administration and Staff: Katherine Sonnick, Essex Community Development Director; Darren Schibler, Town Planner; Robin Pierce, Essex Junction Community Development Director

Members of the Public: Jean MacBride, Essex Reporter

1. CALL TO ORDER AND AGENDA ADDITIONS / CHANGES

Ballard called the meeting to order at 3:02 PM.

There were no changes to the agenda.

2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

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

3. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Introductions for New Members and Staff

Ballard introduced new Commissioners including Ned Daly, appointed by the City of Essex Junction, Ta-Tanisha Redditta, appointed by the City of Essex Junction, and Rupesh Asher, appointed for the Town of Essex. Ballard said that there will be an opportunity for each member to introduce themselves at future meetings.

Ballard introduced Katherine Sonnick, the newly hired Essex Community Development Director.

b. Onboarding / Training for New Members

Ballard provided an overview of the Housing Commission for new members, noting that it has a broad mission that covers many possible initiatives.

Schibler discussed Essex's housing needs. The Essex Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) was included in the orientation package. Major needs include housing that will serve a broad range of household types, responding to changing demographic trends, ensuring that housing/economic development/land use fit together well, balancing downtown development and preservation of the rural landscape, and

meeting the needs of specific groups like low-income households, people with special needs, and people experiencing homelessness.

Ballard noted that the HNA had suggestions of possible housing solutions that led to different working groups, including Inclusionary Zoning, Housing Trust Fund, and a Rental Registry. The Commission has spent much of its time building knowledge and learning how to bring changes to different municipalities. Watson described how the process of bringing proposals forward has been cumbersome due to separate Selectboard/Board of Trustees and separate Planning Commissions.

Ballard explained the recent Housing Commission charter changes, which call for 5 commissioners from the City and 5 from the Town. Currently there are 5 from the City and 3 from the Town appointed so far. The quorum comes from the full body. Smith described that the Commission would need to create a process for collaboration and separate bodies. The intent is that once the Commissions separate, the separate municipalities will increase the membership to 7 members on each Commission. The process and timeline are not yet completely clear for how the groups will separate.

Daly asked about separate needs between the two committees and the limitations for each municipality, highlight the limits of what the Town infrastructure can support. Schibler replied that there are some challenges to increasing density with infrastructure, but that the Town has opportunities to expand infill density. In order to support density in some areas the Town will need to expand traffic, stormwater, and wastewater capacity. The Town is already working on expanding water main (1-1.5 years), increasing wastewater capacity (2-5 years), and has funding to do so. He highlighted a bylaw modernization grant to update zoning to allow increased density and encourage a greater variety of unit types. The Commission agreed to add infrastructure as a future topic of discussion to meeting.

Watson expressed the hope that a clearer picture of needs and opportunities will emerge with separate municipalities, since the Town and City have very different priorities and development patterns. This may make it easier for the Commission to recommend housing solutions. Ballard suggested that the Commission check back in with City and Town in 2 to 3 months to learn if they have updated priorities.

Pierce commented that it can be difficult to identify areas to increase density. He noted that the Chittenden Crossing neighborhood redevelopment has run into challenges with HUD funding not allowing housing near railroad tracks.

Schibler discussed open meeting laws for new members. Although working groups of no more than 4 members are exempted, all other meetings included votes and resolutions must be warned. Minutes are taken for each meeting, and agendas are posted prior to meetings in town/city offices, libraries and online. Ballard pointed out that emails involving more than 4 Commissioners constitute a quorum, and all materials in the reading file are public.

c. Election of Officers

Schibler discussed the roles of elected officers, noting that the Commission can make its own rules. The Chair is a leadership role and manages each meeting and sets agenda with staff. The Vice Chair supports the Chair and fills in when needed. The Clerk takes minutes and ensures they are posted.

Ballard noted that these appointments are just until separation, and in about 9 months the Commission will reevaluate ahead of separation

Ballard and Smith expressed interested in remaining in their current positions. Watson declined to continue as Clerk

Ballard made a motion for Gabrielle Smith to be elected as Vice Chair. The motion was seconded by Daly. The motion passed 6-0.

Smith made a motion for Katie Ballard to be elected as Chair. The motion was seconded by Daly. The motion passed 6-0.

No Commissioner put their name forward as Clerk. Staff will file minutes for the time being. The Commission will discuss again in several weeks.

d. Approval of Minutes

Ballard made a motion, seconded by Redmond, to approve the minutes of June 15, 2022. The motion passed 5-0, with Daly abstaining.

e. Working Group Updates

Ballard gave an update on the Housing Trust Fund. The working group includes Ballard, Smith, and Schibler. The group is planning presentations for the Selectboard and City Council in August. The working group will share it with the Commission first. The goal is to add it to City and Town ballots next spring. The HTF may offering funding for variety of uses, including rental housing, first-time homebuyers or other support for homeowners. Smith added that the presentation

will not include a specific proposal but will focus on introducing the topic and learning about priorities from Board. It may take a while to build up funds before awarding.

Watson described Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) for new Commissioners. She discussed how the working group had gathered a great deal of information but had found it difficult to make decisions. IZ has fairly limited possibilities for requirements, but the details matter and there is ultimately no way to completely ensure that IZ rules will create affordability while also not discouraging development. Ballard asked that the working group make a presentation to the Commission during the second week of August with proposal for IZ policy and the Commission will make a decision to move policy forward.

Ballard stated the strategic policy and next steps for the Commission will be discussed at the next meeting. She would like to hear the new members' priorities for housing.

4. Reading File

No comments on reading file.

5. Adjourn

Ballard called meeting to close at 4:31 PM.

Minutes prepared and submitted by Mia Watson, Clerk.

Minutes approved August 17, 2022.