

**HOUSING COMMISSION
(DRAFT)**

**TOWN OF ESSEX
HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, September 21, 2022**

City Representatives: Gabrielle Smith, Chair; Mia Watson; Ned Daly, Ta-Tanisha Redditta, Rupesh Asher

Town Representatives: Rupesh Asher; Mark Redmond

Administration and Staff: Darren Schibler, Town Planner. Regina Mahony, City Manager

1. CALL TO ORDER AND AGENDA ADDITIONS / CHANGES

Smith called the meeting to order at 3:03 PM. Since Regina Mahony would be attending a few minutes late, Commission members agreed to discuss Town Regulations first in Business Item b.

2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

There were no members of the public present.

3. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Approval of Minutes

Smith was incorrectly listed as in attendance during the Housing Commission meeting on August 7, and asked that this be corrected. **Daly made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Redmond, to approve the minutes of August 7, 2022 as amended. The motion passed 6-0.**

b. Amendments to Town Zoning Regulations, City Land Development Code

Schibler discussed the changes to Town Zoning Regulations. He emphasized these are fairly moderate changes and future revisions are planned to encourage infill development. Changes included revising PUD requirements from 6 units to 2, as some developments were applying for PUDs when they should be using subdivision process. There were also changes to definitions and permissions around congregate housing and group homes. In addition, now there will be no permits needed for needed for interior renovations and repairs, so long as roofline or square footage does not change. This will reduce the cost of home renovations.

Watson advocated for loosening zoning code to promote infill development. She praised the zoning changes enabling easier approval of duplex to fourplexes, but argued that all zoning references to “character of the area” should be removed in favor of a more-form based approach.

Regina Mahony joined to discuss City Land Development Code changes. These included no conditional use needed for ADUs, and increase in density in multifamily zones, and adding duplexes and triplexes are permitted uses in residential zones. Most changes were intended to simplify the code, and more work may need to be done in the future. In addition, the new code reduces residential parking requirements from 2 to 1, and expands shared parking options in mixed use zones.

Schibler asked how the City plans to adopt the code changes. Mahony said that the City is not yet ready to warn these changes and may want to do more thinking on this before adopting.

Daly asked about coverage for the new City Housing Commission, as it is unclear how staff will support the group. Mahony agreed to look into this and said that City staffing discussions are ongoing.

c. Inclusionary Zoning Policy Decisions

Watson briefly recapped the presentation from last meeting, highlighting the current need for more affordable housing with the risks of discouraging development with too steep requirements. This has made it difficult for working group and larger Commission to move forward. The Commission had been asked to approve the proposal of 10% inclusive units targeted to 80% AMI for rental and 120% AMI for homeownership.

Commissioners agreed that the issue was challenging. Possible incentives and cost reductions for developers were discussed. Watson highlighted how developer Erik Hoekstra from Redstone had suggested there were fairly limited incentives available to the municipalities, however, introducing more certainty into the planning process (for example, through form-based code) could improve process. Schibler added that Hoekstra had mentioned that state planning designations, particularly Neighborhood Development Areas, make a big difference. Redmond added that Hoekstra had raised legitimate concerns about cost issues that make it very difficult for developers currently.

Watson asked Mahony to weigh in, acknowledging that she has not been in her new role long or discussed this in detail. While Mahony agreed that the specific proposal ideas are good, but there is a real question on whether to proceed with IZ and the effects that might have on housing affordability and availability in the current market. She also noted that IZ produces relatively few affordable units for the amount of

administration and effort required, compared to partnering with non-profit housing developers on larger-scale affordable housing projects. Schibler believes that the question of whether to adopt an IZ policy has less to do with producing more housing that is more affordable, and more about ensuring that new housing is available to households with a wider range of incomes. He believes the best time to implement IZ is when significant new development is anticipated or enabled.

Asher asked what the long-term costs of IZ would be to developers and the municipalities. Schibler responded that the municipal costs are mainly in staff time to administer the policy and monitor compliance (unless there are fee waivers or subsidies). Mahony responded that costs for owned IZ units wouldn't be a concern, but income-restricted rental units can significantly reduce operating revenue for a developer / landlord, such that they must create twice as many market-rate units to offset the loss.

Smith suggested that the main issue was whether to move forward with IZ policy at all. She asked staff to add the item to next meeting's agenda when the Commission will make a decision to move forward now, or delay for a certain period of time. Watson added that if the Commission chooses to hold off, it should include discussion of what factors would make IZ possible in the future.

4. Adjourn

Smith called the meeting to a close at 4:32 PM.

Minutes prepared by Mia Watson.