

**TOWN OF ESSEX / CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
JOINT HOUSING COMMISSION
Minutes of October 5, 2022.**

City Representatives: Katie Ballard, Chair; Gabrielle Smith, Vice Chair; Mia Watson; Ned Daly; Ta-Tanisha Redditta.

Town Representatives: Emily Taylor, Clerk; Rupesh Asher; Mark Redmond.

Administration and Staff: Darren Schibler, Town Planner.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND AGENDA ADDITIONS / CHANGES

Ballard called the meeting to order at 3:01 PM. There were no proposed changes to the agenda.

2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

Mia Watson has taken a new position within VHFA and will resign from the Housing Commission; today will be Watson's last meeting.

Darren Schibler has taken a position with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission and will no longer serve as Staff Support for the Commission.

Watson's resignation opens a City representative seat on the Commission.

BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Minutes

There were no corrections to the minutes from September 21, 2022.

Redmond made a motion, seconded by Daly, to approve the minutes of September 21, 2022. The motion passed 6-0-2.

b. Inclusionary Zoning Policy Decision / Vote

Ballard would like to bring in feedback from the community on Inclusionary Zoning Policy and Development (IZ) and present it as a recommendation to the Planning Commission. Commission has voted previously to move this policy forward.

Watson recommends that the Commission decide on the bulk of the proposal, like income limits and market rate limits, while the Planning Commission would need to hold the policy and create incentives for developers.

Ballard agrees with Watson and notes that the Planning Commission may not be able to focus on both Town and City policy soon after the separation. Daly notes advancements made on the policy especially from Watson and Redmond and believes now is the time to get it in front of the Planning Commission, whether or not they can act on it.

Ballard adds the perspective that moving IZ forward will also help residents experiencing housing insecurity and begin the conversation in the Town and City that

affordable housing will be prioritized. Ballard would like to know which Commissioners are interested in joining the IZ workgroup following Watson's resignation.

Ballard made a motion, seconded by Daly, to approve the proposal presented by Watson and Redmond outlining policy for Inclusionary Zoning and move it forward to the Planning Commission. The motion passed 7-0.

c. Housing Trust Fund Policy Decision

Ballard begins discussion on the Housing Trust Fund (HTF). Policy Ballard wants to focus on is down payment assistance; security deposits; emergency funds (back rent assistance and utility assistance); code compliance (support for housing providers in maintaining properties); energy efficiency; and contributions to affordable and subsidized units. Ballard also wants to explore sources of funding for the HTF and policies for funding, as well as who will control the funds. Ballard wonders if the group should discuss the idea of a larger Essex Housing Authority to manage the fund, and that could leverage the funds for affordable housing. This is not something that would be moving forward but something to consider moving forward with this discussion.

Schibler adds that in thinking of something like an Essex Housing Authority to manage the funds, the questions coming up for the HTF are what it will accomplish, what gaps it will fill, and how it will be most useful.

Watson offers that beginning a Housing Authority for the area would need considerable regulation and recognition from HUD and the State. Ballard clarifies that she's wondering if it's an exploratory topic worth looking into while acknowledging it would be difficult to create and wouldn't fully manage a HTF. Ballard is not proposing that we move this topic forward.

Smith would like to see the HTF moved forward and set up before it needs to be drawn from in order to have time to establish the fund and build a foundation. Smith thinks this is a valuable resource for both municipalities to support added housing in the community.

Daly asked for clarification on how the Commission can provide guidance on the HTF and support the policy to ensure supportive affordable housing without being in the role as Developer. Ballard notes the HTF was included in the Town's Housing Needs Assessment and considering the work the workgroup has done, would like to move the proposal forward to present this policy to the Planning Commission and Select Board, noting that a funding mechanism has not been identified so far. Ballard responds to Daly's question of who will follow HTF that a group of Trustees would follow the HTF so no one Commission or Board would be responsible for the HTF.

Smith says trustees could be engaged by reaching out to Housing Commission members from various communities that were interviewed when the Joint Essex

Housing Commission formed. Smith adds that the HTF likely won't go anywhere unless taxes are tied to it as a funding mechanism.

Daly asks if the Planning Commission wants to move forward, would that be the point that Commission members begin to work closer with them rather than coming back to the HC as a whole? Ballard encourages that we could ask them but isn't sure of their capacity to contribute a liaison based on previous requests for ongoing engagement from Planning Commission members, noting their increased capacity.

Ballard concludes discussion with the understanding that the HC is prepared to bring an initial HTF presentation to the Planning Commission, limiting scope of use to topics introduced today, identifying a funding mechanism, and working with the Town and City on ongoing liaison support.

Watson asks if the HTF would be used for supporting affordable and subsidized housing. Ballard is open to adding that into the list of topics of use.

d. Town plan 2024 Working Group

Ballard introduces the Essex Town Work Plan with the goal of identifying a HC member to attend this group and meetings regularly. The Select Board has been focused on establishing workgroups with various Commissions and Committees in an effort to be more collaborative and the 2024 Town Plan is their current focus.

Schibler offers additional context. The project is to update the 2024 Town Plan that needs to be finalized at the end of 2023 so it can be voted on during March's Town Meeting Day ballot. Language needs to updating, community outreach for further input on community developments over the next 8 years is needed, and then the full document needs to be compiled. Meeting schedule so far seems to be weekday afternoon meetings every few weeks.

Smith notes that it may make sense for a Town Commissioner to join this group rather than a City Commissioner. Ballard agrees and notes the added pressure for Town Commissioners who may not have capacity and wanted to open it up. Ballard will continue as stand in and asks Commissioners to think about it after today's meeting.

Ballard and Schibler reviewed the Plan and identified four current actions that the Commission would like to give feedback on. Recommendations from the Housing Commission would include support for updating the Housing Needs Assessment for the Town, developing regulations to further promote and remove barriers to affordable housing, creating a HTF, continue to form affordable housing alliances with established affordable housing providers, and create a survey or forum for opportunities for community engagement related to housing needs.

Ballard will send an email to the Select Board outlining the above items to edit and note that the HC is working on identifying a Commissioner to join the workgroup.

Schibler will share the current Town Plan and identify pages specific to the Housing Commission. Schibler adds that reviewing the HC charter and recommended goals from the Needs Assessment and updating it within the Town Plan would be beneficial.

3. Reading File

There was no discussion on the reading file.

4. Other Business

- a. At the end of every future meeting, Commissioner Comments will be a standing agenda item. Commissioners can present anything they need to without sending an email ahead of time.
- b. Rights and Democracy is making efforts across the state to add Tenant Rights language to charters. Essex Town has an opportunity to include language around tenancy rights as they review their charter to prepare it for Town Meeting 2023. Ballard will have a conversation with Tom Proctor from Rights and Democracy and will bring more information back to the HC. This can be a future meeting agenda item.
- c. The Adult Program at the Center of Technology at Essex (CTE) is looking to see if there is interest in collaboration between the HC and CTE for a housing construction-training program. CTE provides the labor and coordination for new construction and development. Ballard would like to invite them an upcoming meeting in November to talk more about this partnership opportunity. Watson offered that she can be available if any initiatives need financing and/or are looking for finance resources.
- d. Ballard advised that the HC may need to adjust meetings in November and will follow up at the October 19, 2022 meeting.

5. Adjourn

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 4:21pm.

Minutes prepared and submitted by Emily Taylor, Clerk.