

**TOWN OF ESSEX
HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, September 6, 2023**

Housing Commission (HC): Deb Flannery (Chair), Rupesh Asher (Vice Chair), Lauren Ressue (Clerk)

Administration and Staff: Kent Johnson (Town Planner)

1. CALL TO ORDER AND AGENDA ADDITIONS / CHANGES

Ms. Flannery called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM. There were no proposed changes to the agenda.

2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

There were no members of the public present.

3. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Minutes

Corrections

Mr. Asher made a motion, seconded by Ms. Ressue, to approve the minutes of 9/6/23. The motion passed 3-0.

b. Town Plan update – discussion and work session

Ms. Flannery initiated this conversation by asking Mr. Johnson about what he knows about the relationship between the Town plan and Housing Assessment.

Mr. Johnson provided the following background: the Housing Assessment was a recommendation in 2016 Town Plan; the Housing Assessment made a number of recommendations (e.g. Create Housing Commission); the findings from the Housing Assessment could be folded into the new Town Plan. He also mentioned that the Town of Essex staff is working on updating the data, so collecting the data is not a needed task of the Housing Commission at this time. He will send out the updated census data in the next few days.

Ms. Flannery mentioned that it will be helpful not only to have the updated data but it will be more useful to have the data interpreted in context and comparing data as relevant to housing. Ms. Ressue offered to consider the new data and work on visualizing them in ways that would help understand the current housing situation in Essex. Having a better understanding of the data will allow the Commission to provide policy guidance.

Ms. Flannery then summarized the two main current concerns of the Commission:

- 1) Housing that already exists and its suitability (how much of current housing is substandard)
- 2) Is more housing needed? And related questions: How do we make more? What does it look like to do business in Essex Town and for housing developers? How do we create an environment that's favorable to developers? Is there an inventory of existing housing stock?

Mr. Johnson inserted that Essex Town has information on value of housing and some other variables such as whether a unit is multi/single family.

Mr. Asher asked about what areas developers can use. If we have that knowledge, we could bring developers and let them know what resources we have for the. Mr. Johnson replied that right now, developers would have to look at zoning maps and suggested an action of creating a more user-friendly zoning map, since zoning is complicated given both state and local regulations.

Mr. Johnson also suggested a possible action of connecting with developers to get a sense of whether regulations are slowing them down or not, or if the challenges is more related to land/labor/material prices or other items out of our control such as high interest rates.

Ms. Flannery asked about whether Essex has a Development Review Board. Mr. Johnson replied that currently development review is handled by the Planning Commission but the Town will soon be introducing a Development Review Board that will take this role from the Planning Commission.

Ms. Flannery recommended we have conversations with the Planning Commission (and soon-to-be Development Review Board) so learn more from the developers what the real barriers are in Essex. Would performing a 360 review be a good step? Mr. Johnson suggested possibly providing a survey along with each development application to learn more about the challenges, but also recommended looking into how other municipalities are evaluating their development process.

Ms. Flannery then opened it up to the Commission to suggest next steps in regard to updating the Town Plan. It was decided that although the best next steps would be to assess the available data, since updates to the Town Plan have to be finalized by October, the Commission will start with the recommendations in the Housing Assessment and update/edit them to fit the current context and priorities. Ms. Rensue will pull together a first draft and then share it with Ms. Flannery as a first step. Assessing the data and performing a type of gap analysis will also be included as an action item in the Town Plan. Mr. Johnson stated that the new plan will be in effect for 8 years.

4. Adjourn

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 4:04pm.

Minutes submitted by Lauren Ressue, Clerk