

**TOWN OF ESSEX  
HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES  
Wednesday, November 1, 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.

Ms. Flannery requested adding an agenda item to discuss a possible meeting with the select board.

**2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

There were no members of the public present.

**3. BUSINESS ITEMS**

**a. Minutes**

No corrections to the minutes of the previous meeting were recommended.

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

**b. Discuss and Approve Town Plan Comments**

Mr. Johnson pointed out that one change was made to the Housing Section of the Town Plan after it was submitted by the Housing Commission to the town. One action item was removed:

Incorporate a feedback mechanism into the implementation of the new Development Review Board and consider evaluation of the Development Review Board process after one year.

Mr. Johnson said he would find out why it was not included in the current draft of the Town Plan.

Ms. Flannery asked the HC to approve the plan as it is, pending the one remaining item. Ms. Ressue made the motion to approve the plan and Mr. Asher seconded it.

**c. Discuss meeting with Select Board**

Ms. Flannery informed the HC that the Select Board has asked to speak with the HC about its plans and workplan. She said they are particularly interested in what the HC sees as its financial needs – what it sees as worth investing money in.

**d. DISCUSS WORK PLAN, WORK ASSIGNMENTS, AND SCHEDULE**

Mr. Asher pointed out that a task on the work plan has to be to look at the data since

we do not have the data yet to make decisions. The HC then discussed that there's a lot of data publicly available that could be found and put into content. Mr. Johnson put forth that the town could possibly help with either some funds or some volunteer work to search out the data. Furthermore, he suggested thinking about whether there's needed data that's not already available that we could obtain through a survey.

Ms. Ressue raised the issue of who the data is for and what format should it be in. She furthermore addressed the challenge of not knowing what the target for housing-related data should be. Ms. Flannery agreed that research will have to be done about methodology.

Mr. Johnson recommended putting a deadline on the data gathering part of the work plan as data gathering and interpretation could go on indefinitely and could prevent other work from being done. Ms. Flannery agreed but pointed out the importance of making data-driven decisions. Ms. Ressue pointed out that a plan for data maintenance should also be included in the workplan to ensure use of most recent data.

Ms. Flannery reminded the HC to focus on the deliverables related to data gathering and benchmarking.

Mr. Johnson then brought up another task for the HC workplan in the upcoming year. He informed the HC that although Housing Act 47 changed state regulations around building, Essex has not had a chance to fully review this act and update its own regulations to reflect the changes. He recommended that the HC assess the changes and make recommendations for how Essex should update its regulations. Ms. Flannery asked about what the HC role specifically should be in this. Mr. Johnson replied that he will bring his thoughts to the HC and the HC will advise him. The updates would then go to the Select Board to be approved. Ms. Flannery replied that this sounds consistent with the role of the HC but probably depends on Mr. Johnson educating the HC on the specifics of these regulations. It was decided that Mr. Johnson would start this process at the January meeting of the HC.

The HC discussed some of the challenges of development related to Housing Act 47 including water/sewer lines, infrastructure capacity and residents' needs and interests for the town. Ms. Ressue asked what was found via the recent focus groups for the Town Plan. Ms. Flannery and Mr. Johnson replied that there seems to be interest in developing areas that are already developed and keeping other areas sparsely developed.

Ms. Flannery then asked about the other two action items in the Housing Section of the Town Plan related to housing resources and developers. Mr. Asher replied that it is important to identify developers. Mr. Johnson and Ms. Flannery both have some

connections they will reach out to, potentially with the goal of having one or two join the HC.

Ms. Flannery wrapped up the meeting by stating she will reach out to Mr. Asher and Ms. Ressue to follow up on creating the workplan and starting to make progress on the tasks.

**4. Adjourn**

**The Chair adjourned the meeting at 4:30pm.**

Minutes submitted by Lauren Ressue, Clerk