

TOWN OF ESSEX HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, April 3, 2025

Housing Commission (HC): Anna Brouillette (Chair), Lauren Ressue (Vice Chair), Noah Detzer; absent: Carolyn Ellenberger (Clerk), Rupesh Asher

Administration and Staff: Kent Johnson (Town Planner)

Guests: None

In the absence of a clerk, the following minutes were prepared using Zoom AI Companion.

Summary:

The Housing Commission welcomed a new member, Noah Detzer.

During the meeting, Commission members discussed transitioning to a new file-sharing system, housing targets, potential zoning changes, and development strategies. The community explored partnerships and collaborations to address housing challenges, considering affordable housing options and the development of a municipal complex. The group also discussed data collection, community engagement, and future meeting topics related to housing and development in the area.

Next steps:

- Kent to look into what other town committees are doing regarding working document file storage and sharing.
- Lauren to reach out to Chittenden County RPC to present at the next meeting about housing targets and future land use mapping.
- Kent to provide the Commission with the updated municipal complex plan report when available.
- Anna to continue developing the housing crisis fact sheet with Essex-specific information.
- Kent to prepare a recap of relevant housing insights from the American Planning Association Conference for the next meeting.

- Commission members to reapply for their positions before the June deadline, if applicable.

Discussion Notes:

Transition to New File-Sharing Tool

The meeting focused on the transition from Google Drive to a new file-sharing tool due to public meeting law and access issues. The team discussed the need to update and share certain documents, like the work plan and housing resources document, with the town office for public access. They also explored the use of a private Google Drive for working documents, considering the challenges of multiple users accessing the same document simultaneously. The team agreed to review how other groups handle working document file storage.

Essex Junction Housing Unit Targets

The team discussed the housing unit targets for Essex Junction, with the highest end asking for a 76% growth by 2050. They also discussed the annual number of new housing units needed to reach the targets, with a low of 50 and a high of 148. The team also mentioned the need to verify the current number of housing units in Essex Junction, as it seemed too low. The conversation ended with plans to gather more data on the housing units in the next couple of weeks.

Zoning Changes for Essex Housing

The community discussed the need for more housing in Essex, considering zoning changes to allow residential construction in business districts and industrial parks. They acknowledged that this would require a lengthy process and potential unintended consequences. The group also discussed the need for redevelopment sites and the possibility of increasing the number of units per site. They agreed to review and comment on the proposed changes by May 19th. The community also considered the potential for similar zoning changes in other towns as a case study. The discussion also touched on the need to include targets for 2030 and the challenges associated with meeting ambitious housing targets.

Sewer Core Area Development Challenges

The discussion focused on the development of properties in the sewer core area, emphasizing the importance of keeping it residentially zoned. The attendees discussed the challenges of balancing industrial and residential uses, particularly in areas like Saxon Hill Industrial Park and the Susie Wilson area. They also

considered the impact of heavy manufacturing on the environment and the need for compatibility with residential areas. The next steps include reaching out to the county RPC folks for a future meeting to discuss future land use mapping and comment on the targets.

Addressing Housing Market Challenges

The discussion focused on the challenges faced by business of finding employees due to the tight housing market. Commission members suggested exploring partnerships with the Economic Development Commission to address this issue. They discussed potential collaborations, such as purchasing single-family homes and converting them into duplexes or triplexes for sale to employees at lower costs. The idea of connecting with the tech school for job training was also brought up. Commission members proposed a joint meeting with the Account Development Committee to further discuss these ideas. The conversation ended with the agreement to explore these opportunities further.

Affordable Housing Development Costs Discussion

The team discussed the cost of developing affordable housing versus regular housing. They noted that the cost of developing affordable housing might be higher due to additional regulations and permitting fees. However, they were unsure if these costs were related to the affordability of the housing for tenants. They decided to seek further information from Champlain Housing Trust and Deb, who has knowledge about affordable housing. They also considered reaching out to Deb for a general introduction to affordable housing.

Municipal Complex Development and Housing Options

Commission members discussed the potential development of a municipal complex, which includes residential housing. They considered various options, such as selling the land to the highest bidder or developing it with a focus on affordable housing. They also discussed the importance of staying ahead of the development process and making their position clear to the Select Board and other partners. They emphasized the potential for the housing project to generate equity for the community and the need to make a strong case for its development.

Discussing Housing Data and Committee Roles

The group discusses wrapping up the meeting and shares updates. A member reports progress on consulting a census expert and compiling housing data for public access. They discuss the need to present location-specific information and

explain the housing crisis to the community. Another member mentions attending an American Planning Association Conference and suggests discussing accessory dwelling units at the next meeting. The group also briefly touches on the process of reapplying for committee positions, which involves submitting a new application when terms expire.