

**HOUSING COMMISSION
(DRAFT)**

**TOWN OF ESSEX
HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, November 3, 2021**

Housing Commission (HC): Katie Ballard, Chair; Gabrielle Smith, Vice Chair; Mia Watson, Clerk; Mark Redmond; Michelle Teegarden, Alison Levy, Emily Taylor

Administration and Staff: Owiso Makuku, Essex Community Development Director; Robin Pierce, Essex Junction Community Development Director; Darren Schibler, Town Planner

1. CALL TO ORDER AND AGENDA ADDITIONS / CHANGES

Ballard called the meeting to order at 3:04 PM.

Watson made a motion, seconded by Smith to add the Essex Junction separation vote to the agenda.

2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

There were no members of the public present.

3. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Welcome new member, Alison Levy, to the Housing Commission

b. Discussion on EJ Separation vote

Ballard suggested that Andy Watts & Andrew Brown be invited to address the HC regarding impact of this vote on the HC – and how they want to interact with the commission, re: Charter; Need to maintain this issue on future agendas to prepare for future outcomes.

Smith expressed interest in determining our mission/purpose before and after official separation.

Watson: Likely that there will be two separate housing commissions (Town and City/Village); Need to help ensure the Selectboard makes joint HC issues a priority, but continue with working group efforts in the interim

Schibler – There are no legal restrictions that would preclude the HC from being a combined Essex/EJ commission; Makuku suggested that there are historical examples (i.e. MIT/Harvard) that demonstrate the value of working as a joint commission.

Smith queried whether or not there are examples in VT of non-overlapping municipalities with a joint HC. Schibler cited examples in VT of other (not housing) committees that work jointly and could be beneficial for us to research that. Watson expressed some concern for logistical issues/challenges with joint collaboration, despite benefits.

Taylor offered to reach out to other VT communities who have collaborative HC and bring research to next meeting.

c. Approval of Minutes

Smith made a motion, seconded by Redmond, to approve the minutes of October 6, 2021 as written. The motion passed 7-0.

d. Recap of recent housing-related events

- i. October 13 Housing Summit in Arlington; Ballard attended and reported on her takeaways – i.e. discussion short term rentals of 2nd homes; excellent presentation by VHFA rep on affordable housing statewide; How municipalities and local governments can use funds to purchase land for affordable housing – HC should have a voice in the latter, etc. Ballard will share materials and documents with Essex HC.

Makuku noted problem with out-of-staters purchasing homes in VT which should prompt discussion in Essex about the impact of Airbnb properties on available homes.

- ii. October 27 housing forum w/VT representatives (attended by several housing commissioners):

Excellent presentation by Maura Collins from VHFA as well as presentation on Essex HC by Ballard. Rep. Karen Dolan inquired what/when the HC will offer community forums; support demonstrated for rental survey efforts; ADU's noted as on the rise and a good opportunity for affordable housing options; Schibler: Application for a grant is in the works to study options related to this.

NOTE: Smith took over meeting for Ballard at 3:56, who had to leave.

e. Working Group updates

i. Housing Survey

Teegarden and Taylor – Municipal Planning Grant – application deadline was Nov. 1 (fiscal year July 30) – can apply next year; when applying for funding will yield 10% match from Town; MPG available to municipalities (Makuku) needs to coordinate with us re: application – Contact staff before application; Taylor researching rental data that some of the larger properties (Cathedral Square); Housing survey should be comprehensive vs. just rental survey; Teegarden and Taylor are meeting with Mark Demers at CVOEO on 11/12/21. Watson suggested that working group consult VHFA website.

ii. Housing Trust Fund

Smith had no additional items to report– Will provide timeline for next steps.

iii. Inclusionary Zoning

Watson reported that Trustees/Select Board very supportive of IZ after presentation; Watson and Redmond will develop a round table with developers; Meet w/Planning Commission to determine next steps; establish homeownership vs rental options, etc. Select Board & Trustees would like a timeline – per Watson, hopefully within a year. Levy supported consultation with other communities with IZ; Makuku noted developers' sensitivity to complying with regs, income targeting & density requirements, etc. Levy questioned requirement of consistency of unit quality w/IZ – and determining who is in charge of making sure those policies are maintained. Taylor: Noted that new high rises in Winooski adopted IZ (info as CHT coordinator) – 25%-30% affordable; partnered with advocates in the community for permanent affordable housing.

f. Town Center Development Project Update

- i. Makuku – proposing commercial use on ground floor instead of residential use; Schibler shared site plan: along Commonwealth Ave/Carmichael; includes underground and street level parking – Issue with intrusive headlights into ground floor units if not commercial space; Issues w/sidewalk overhang w/parked cars; not fully accessible with elevated curb, poor aesthetic views for residents; More development proposed.

Smith expressed concerned about “questionable” developer and their lack of responsiveness to Town's' interests/requests that relate to quality of life for future residents. Schibler explained that we have provisions in regulations that prevent developer from straying too far from site plan. Would like HC to weigh in with feedback, observations, and concerns. Watson pointed out its consistent failure to comply with zoning regulations. Should HC draft a letter with concerns (for that and other projects)?

Planning Commission meeting will take this up on November 18. Makuku recommended that HC members attend this meeting. Charter stipulates that HC is expected to weigh in on projects related to housing – but need to continue this conversation in next meeting (first agenda item).

Smith suggested that she and Ballard meet about this and will follow up with staff. Other HC can send their thoughts/feedback to Smith.

4. Adjourn

Smith adjourned the meeting at 4:45 PM.

Minutes prepared by Michelle Teegarden. Minutes reviewed and submitted by Mia Watson, Clerk. Minutes approved November 17, 2021.