

HOUSING COMMISSION

TOWN OF ESSEX
HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, January 5, 2022

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

Administration and Staff: Owiso Makuku, Essex Community Development Director; Darren Schibler, Town Planner; Sharon Kelley, Essex Zoning Administrator; Jean O'Sullivan, Essex Economic Development Director.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND AGENDA ADDITIONS / CHANGES

Ballard called the meeting to order at 3:03 PM.

Ballard made a motion, seconded by Redmond, to re-order agenda items. The motion passed 6-0.

2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

There were no members of the public present.

3. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Approval of Minutes

Levy made a motion, seconded by Ballard, to approve the minutes from December 1, 2021. The motion passed 6-0.

b. Inclusionary Zoning presentation at Village Planning Commission

Watson described the Inclusionary Zoning presentation on Village Planning Commission on December 16th. The Planning Commission was enthusiastic about an inclusionary zoning policy and suggested that they could implement it more quickly as part of the land development code update that they already have in progress. She was unsure whether they intend to do so. Ballard asked Watson to follow up with Village Planning Commission about their next steps.

Ballard noted that representatives from Board of Trustees and Selectboard will be attending the next Housing Commission meeting, and that it will be helpful to discuss expectations about the role of the Commission and how it works with our groups.

c. Essex Economic Development Coordinator Introduction

Jean O'Sullivan is the new Essex Economic Development Coordinator, a newly created staff position. She introduced herself to the Commission and described her background as a long-time state representative, now retired. She highlighted the intersection of economic issues and housing. O'Sullivan intends to stay in contact with the Housing Commission to discuss shared opportunities.

d. Strategic Planning

Commission discussed planning for upcoming projects and initiatives. At next meeting on January 19th, representatives from Board of Trustees and Selectboard will be attending.

Ballard referenced the existing list of topics for the Housing Commission to learn more about, including inviting guest speakers. They include the development review process, housing for seniors, people with disabilities, New Americans, homelessness and youth, and state legislative work. Ballard added that getting funding for the Commission is a priority.

Makuku added that she has become a board member with the VT Affordable Housing Coalition, which is a good resource for the Commission to become more involved with. Teegarden mentioned housing for people leaving corrections, and affordability for working professionals. Schibler added workforce housing, and mental health and substance use disorder. Ballard mentioned domestic violence, exclusionary zoning, communication logistics, local option tax, developers, landlords, and rental housing safety (part of discussion with fire chief).

Levy mentioned climate change and housing, although Ballard and Schibler noted that other committees do that, including the Energy Commission. Makuku mentioned that the topic will be discussed during planning commission meetings, and could invite the Housing Commission.

Ballard also mentioned housing design in mixed-use environments, as the Housing Commission has been asked to weigh in on the issue by both Planning Commissions. Makuku suggested that the Housing Commissions offer toolkits or other resources.

Ballard suggested that working group updates would take place during the second meeting of month, leaving the first meeting more time for learning and guest speakers.

e. Commissioner Profile: Alison Levy

Levy described her background for the Commission. She is a graduate of Cornell University. She started her career in nonprofit arts work, and later stayed home with her children. She served on the Essex Town Selectboard. Later she went back to school at UVM for Master's degree in Education. She taught for several years in Burlington and Essex. In her teaching work, she encountered many students who did not have the resources to succeed, including equitable housing. Upon retiring as a teacher, she wanted to become involved in the community to help solve these systemic problems.

f. Reading File

Ballard discussed the upcoming Homelessness Awareness Day on January 20th. She had attended an organizing meeting. The committee was looking for someone

75 to speak about youth homelessness – she suggested Redmond. The Legislature will
76 be discussing issues related to homeless during the upcoming session. Ballard will
77 be speaking at the vigil event and encouraged Commission members to participate if
78 they are interested.

79 **g. Development Projects Update: 41 Maple Street**

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81 Since Robin Pierce was not present, Ballard asked if anyone who attended the
82 Village Planning Commission meeting on December 16th know if they had approved
83 the proposal for the project at 41 Maple Street. Watson did not think they voted but
84 was not sure when it will be taken up again.

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86 Ballard asked the Housing Commission if it should discuss this project more and if
87 the Commission should act in any way before the next Planning Commission
88 meeting?

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90 Watson advocated that the Commission not weigh in on projects until it develops a
91 policy with criteria for its approval. Noted that the project at 41 Maple Street will likely
92 be approved anyway. Ballard said that the Commission still needs to engage and
93 give intention to discussing projects. Worth discussing at least briefly at the next
94 meeting.

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96 Levy noted that the Commission already has a lot on our agenda and may not have
97 time to discuss every project at its current schedule. Ballard said that not everything
98 on agenda is set in stone and there will still be time for priority items. She will follow
99 up with staff on the proposal and will try to schedule Robin Pierce to discuss the
100 proposal at the next Housing Commission meeting.

101 **4. Adjourn**

102 Redmond volunteered to take minutes at next meeting.

103 **Ballard called meeting to close at 4:33 PM.**

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105 Minutes prepared and submitted by Mia Watson, Clerk.

106 Minutes approved January 19, 2022.