

TOWN OF ESSEX
HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, January 6, 2021

Housing Commission (HC): Evan Einhorn, Vice Chair; Mia Watson, Clerk; Deb McAdoo; Mark Redmond; Michelle Teegarden.

Administration and Staff: Owiso Makuku, Essex Community Development Director; Robin Pierce, Essex Junction Community Development Director; Darren Schibler, Town Planner; Deana Stonebeck, Essex Zoning Administrative Assistant.

Others: None.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND AGENDA ADDITIONS / CHANGES

Einhorn called the meeting to order at 3:10 PM. There were no proposed changes to the agenda.

2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

There were no comments from members of the public present.

3. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Private developers

Discussion

EINHORN introduced the topic. He talked to developer Tom Chase about ways to incentivize developers to build affordable housing. Chase told him that the permitting process is aggravating and works against this. Stonebeck commented that the planning committee meetings are very difficult. Makuku commented that Essex is actually one of the most flexible of all the towns when it comes to zoning, permitting and building.

b. Setting future agendas

Discussion

WATSON introduced the topic. Time to lay the groundwork as a committee, what we would like to explore. Inclusive zoning is one possibility. We may want to talk to both for profit and nonprofit developers, then start setting an agenda and target what we would like to know. Makuku said we may want to host a roundtable of developers. We also need to know what are our existing regulations, what works and what does not. Also look into the possible Housing Trust Fund. WATSON suggested we create a list of things we wish to tackle and prioritize them, and then move into action.

c. Minutes

MCADOO made a motion, seconded by REDMOND, to approve the minutes of December 16, 2020. The motion passed 5-0.

Schibler will email the minutes template to all members.

d. Debrief of Chittenden Housing Convening of 11.31.20

Discussion

Schibler recommends we participate in these hearings. MCADOO recommends we create a registry of all rental properties renters, although there may be an issue of privacy. REDMOND explained that Burlington receives federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds and for the rest of the state it is held by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD), and municipalities can apply for it, in conjunction with nonprofit providers if they so desire. EINHORN asked if there is a published schedule of these meetings. Schibler stated there is no schedule but the next is on 3.29.21 at 6 p.m.

e. Legislation

Discussion

WATSON asked how Essex gets landlords to comply with basic safety standards. Makuku stated that it is complaint-driven only. Schibler will update the committee on the rental housing bill as it moves through the Legislature. MCADOO asked if it is appropriate for our committee to weigh in on a bill. Makuku responded yes but we need to figure out our process for this. We can send letters of support from the committee. Schibler stated that we can draft an opinion and then vote as a committee whether to approve or not. EINHORN asked if there are any upcoming initiatives on housing. REDMOND stated that he has testified in the legislature twice on the Homeless Bill of Rights but it has yet to be passed out of committee. He recommended we invite in Erhard Manke from the Vermont Affordable Housing Commission. WATSON recommends we do so only after we narrow down which issues we would like him to speak to.

f. Staff profile: Robin Pierce

Grew up in Ireland, went to university in Philadelphia, returned to work in Ireland in affordable housing. Back to the United States, worked at the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, then built affordable housing in Stowe, then started working in Essex.

5. ADJOURNMENT

Einhorn called the meeting at 4:30p.m.

Meeting minutes draft submitted by Mark Redmond, Commissioner

Minutes submitted by Mia Watson, Clerk