

TOWN OF ESSEX
HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, February 17, 2021

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

Administration and Staff: Sharon Kelley, Essex Zoning Administrator; Owiso Makuku, Essex Community Development Director; Robin Pierce, Essex Junction Community Development Director; Deana Stoneback, Essex Zoning Administrative Assistant.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND AGENDA ADDITIONS / CHANGES

Ballard called the meeting to order at 3:01 PM. There were no proposed changes to the agenda.

2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

There were no members of the public present.

3. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Approval of Minutes

Corrections

MCADOO made a motion, seconded by TEEGARDEN, to table minute approval for February 3rd meeting until the next meeting on March 3rd to allow the Commissioners time to review the minutes once they are distributed and posted to the website. The motion passed 7-0.

b. Montpelier Housing Task Force interview. BALLARD presented a summary and highlights of her interview with Polly Nichol, Chair of the Task Force, which is a quasi-formal group of volunteers formed 22 years ago. No quorum or required number of members. Polly is the City Council representative; this role is the most formal link between the task force and City Council. Task Force members attend City Council meetings to speak about housing issues when appropriate. NIMBY is a significant issue in Montpelier. No solutions except to note the importance of being proactive to show who benefits. Notable achievement: created a Housing Trust Fund. Also recommended to Essex Housing Commission to consider a Fund. They use the funds most often for landlord's requests (improvements, compliance). Extensive Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU , also known as in-law apartment concept) usage. Held a Housing Summit hosted by a third party. Suggested a forum or gathering of area Housing Commissions. Thriving Communities Initiative mentioned as a resource.

c. Update from Planning Commission Meeting. BALLARD attended the most recent meeting of the Village Planning Commission to present an update on our initial

phase of work. Several committee and commission chairs were invited to speak. Questions from the committee: 1. Do we have an inventory of the different types of housing and the number of bedrooms? Owiso - not really. Some information along these lines could be compiled and shared, for ex. The Housing Needs Assessment. Mia - The American Communities Survey (ACS) gathers such information on a rolling basis. Shared a link in the chat. Census is the best source of data; 2020 Census data due in April. Town plan also a resource for units permitted but not yet built. Gabrielle - what is the specific reason/s for asking? May be in context of updating the land development code. Question 2: Are we exploring grants? Not yet. Still developing our strategies. Question 3. Interested in ADUs. Katie and staff will take the lead in responding to the questions (in writing and/or at the next PC meeting). Katie - best practice for EHC to have a representative at every one of these meetings, held the first Thursday of the month at 6 p.m. **MOTION from SMITH to create a schedule of volunteer representatives for the next 6 months of these meetings. Seconded by MCADOO. Some discussion. Motion passed, 4 yes, 1 abstention.** Schedule: March - Gabrielle; April - Katie; May - Michelle; June - Mia; July - Evan; August - Ballard.

- d. **Discuss inclusionary zoning subcommittee.** For which municipality are we proposing to research/advocate/address for inclusionary zoning? Have to present to both Planning Commissions. What if the response is uneven between the two municipalities? Impact if merger vote passes? Test the waters with both Planning Commissions and Boards. Mia - against the subcommittee now, before we have created our strategic priorities and goals for the coming 6-12 months. Discussion.

4. **Reading File discussion (Housing Needs Assessment/Executive Summary**

a. **Priorities**

What are next best steps based on the Executive Summary? Suggested that we start with the recommendations listed on the summary. **Watson:** In summary, the primary challenge/problem is that home prices in Town & Village are not affordable for low/mid income residents. Is our commission on board with mission to improve that (include affordability, quality, and safety)? **Makuku:** HC has role in making sure the market provides - but are regulations needed to accomplish our goals? Need to determine type of housing per market demands, not just “build more housing.” General consensus among HC members that establishing a Housing Trust Fund would be a recommended priority. **McAdoo** reiterated that a rental registry is needed and suggested establishing relationships with property owners. **Einhorn** noted that it’s important to assess housing inventory (per Winooski).

b. **Inclusionary Zoning discussion**

Need to determine if we want to pursue this as a HC priority if it’s a reasonable tool (among many) - i.e. Winooski opted not to pursue inclusionary zoning. **McAdoo** recommended that we table this decision until we establish our strategic plan.

c. ACTION ITEM: All commissioners should email specific strategic plan ideas/recommendations for our next meeting. ***Send to all HC members.***

5. Katie Ballard presented her profile: Shared rich and extensive personal and professional experiences in advocacy and direct services to individuals with special needs/disabilities (including accessible housing, special education); Strong focus on respecting the dignity of needing/living in subsidized housing.

Next profile: **Owiso Makuku**

Minutes for March 3 meeting: **Deb McAdoo**

6. Adjourn (without a motion) at 4:35 PM

Minutes submitted by Mia Watson, Clerk