

# HOUSING COMMISSION

**TOWN OF ESSEX**  
**HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES**  
**Wednesday, July 21, 2021**

**Housing Commission (HC):** Katie Ballard, Chair; Mia Watson, Clerk; Deb McAdoo; Gabrielle Smith; Michelle Teegarden.

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

**Members of the Public:** Shiferaw Gameda, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity.

## **1. CALL TO ORDER AND AGENDA ADDITIONS / CHANGES**

Ballard called the meeting to order at 3:04 PM. There were no proposed changes to the agenda.

## **2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

Shiferaw Gameda, Community Organizer at Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO) attended as a member of the public. He is working with housing committees statewide, collecting and sharing best practices. CVOEO will be circulating a survey of housing committees, which he will share with the Commission. Ballard offered to share contact information of McAdoo and Teegarden to facilitate any communications work.

## **3. BUSINESS ITEMS**

### **a. Approval of Minutes**

**Smith made a motion, seconded by Teegarden to approve the minutes from June 16, 2021. The motion passed 5-0.**

### **b. Check-in with Selectboard and Trustees**

#### **i. Modification of Housing Commission charter.**

Ballard recently spoke with Andrew Brown, President of the Village Board of Trustees on the upcoming Village separation vote. In the event of separation, the two municipalities would form two separate housing commissions, and Village and Town resident members would join their respective committees. She encouraged commissioners to consider work that would need to be done to set up commissions to be successful independently.

Smith pointed out that the separation could be drawn-out over several years, and that the Commission should continue their current work in the interim. Ballard

37 agreed, and mentioned that Finance Director Sarah Macy could attend Commission  
38 to discuss potential ramifications of separation, including what to do with a potential  
39 housing trust fund. Watson noted that she would like the hypothetical new charters  
40 to allow for commissioners on either commission who do not live in either town or  
41 village, as in the current charter.

42 Ballard will attend Selectboard and Trustees joint meeting on August 23<sup>rd</sup> to update  
43 them update on Commission's work and discuss logistical challenges of  
44 collaboration of other boards. She invited Commissioners to send her any questions  
45 to bring to the meeting. This topic will be added again to the Housing Commission  
46 meeting on August 18<sup>th</sup>.

47 Ballard will also ask Selectboard and Trustees to approve an amendment to the  
48 Housing Commission Charter changing a quorum from three members to four to  
49 allow working groups to meet and email without public notice.

50 **Smith made a motion to support the change to the quorum from three**  
51 **commission members to four. McAdoo seconded. Motion passed 5-0.**

52 **c. Evan Einhorn Resignation**

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54 Einhorn submitted his resignation to the Selectboard and Trustees prior to the  
55 meeting. Ballard acknowledged Einhorn's hard work in chairing the meetings during  
56 her absence. She plans to try to connect with him to make sure that his Vice Chair  
57 duties had not been too burdensome. The Selectboard and Trustees will be  
58 appointing his replacement. In meantime, the Commission will need a replacement  
59 Vice Chair.

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61 McAdoo moved to nominate Watson as Vice Chair. Watson said she would be  
62 willing if someone would volunteer as Clerk to replace her. Ballard nominated Smith  
63 as Vice Chair. Smith agreed to be considered.

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65 **Motion passes 5-0 to appoint Smith as new Vice Chair.**

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67 Ballard asked if Commissioners had any suggestions for potential replacement for  
68 the Selectboard and Trustees to consider for Einhorn's replacement. Watson  
69 suggested that replacement should be someone with zoning experience, potential  
70 someone on Zoning Commission or Development Review Board. Ballard said that  
71 they might consider a landlord or developer. Watson suggested that the Selectboard  
72 and Trustees contact people who applied before and let them know there is a  
73 vacancy. Teegarden asked if it matters whether the replacement is from the Town or  
74 Village. Ballard noted that it does not matter according to the charter, but that since  
75 Einhorn is a Town Resident, town residency could be one factor in consideration.  
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**d. Strategic Planning Check-In**

Ballard said that the current structure with one monthly Commission meeting and separate working group time has not made significant progress in tasks. She wants to consider systems in place to meet more than once a month. She also asked that she be included on any emails discussing working group business, and that all working groups should submit a written report on their progress before each Commission meeting.

Watson suggested that working groups should generate documents noting progress and outstanding questions and set up a document repository. Schibler said that staff can create a Google doc repository for Commissioners. Makuku suggested that all Commissioners and staff have access to resources. Schibler noted that it will be important to ensure that the work in the repository does not violate public meeting laws. Ballard suggested adding page for Housing Commission to Village website (in addition to Town) and eventually adding informational resources for the public.

Smith asked what outcomes the Commission should be consider with strategic planning. Are there timelines for decisions? In particular, should the Commission keep working on the Housing Trust Fund? Ballard replied that both Boards are interested in the HTF. Sarah Macy, Finance Director, can present to either the full Commission or working groups to discuss specifics. Polly Nichols of the Montpelier Housing Task Force will attend an upcoming meeting to discuss their experience with the HTF.

Watson said that Commissioners should be responsible for document review and collecting questions that need to be answered by entire Commission at full meetings. Ballard noted that working groups should do their due diligence and that Commission should be open to stopping work on projects that do not seem promising.

Ballard asked about ways for the public to contact commissioners. Schibler said that the current email address ([housing.commission@essex.org](mailto:housing.commission@essex.org)) goes to staff. Staff will forward communications for reading file during open meeting. Ballard said that Commissioners interested in being contacted personally can put their bio and email on website.

Ballard said that communications and outreach should be consistent item on Agenda. How can we share resources with our community and expand presence? Smith suggested a fun community-oriented outreach, such as a tool lending project. Ballard said that Commission should host an event by the end of the calendar year. Makuku suggested that Commission meet in other community spaces to encourage participation. Teegarden suggested an open house event. Ballard suggested some form of monthly update from Commissioners to public. Smith noted the importance of storytelling to bring people together across community differences, including communication during separation discussions.

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Ballard asked if Commission would be interested in extending meeting time since Einhorn (who requested earlier adjournment) is no longer on Commission. She suggested Commission discuss next time.

**e. Work Group Updates**

Due to lack of time, these topics were not discussed outside of strategic planning.

- i. Housing Trust Fund**
- ii. Inclusionary Zoning**
- iii. Rental Registry/Landlord Survey**

**f. Housing Development Projects Update**

Watson described Depot Junction, a new 43-unit affordable housing development that will be part of the Chittenden Crossing master redevelopment at Five Corners. Her organization (Vermont Housing Finance Agency) awarded state tax credits to the project. Ballard asked what incentives helped convince the development (the Braverman Company) to build there. Pierce said that his office encouraged the developer to build some affordable homes there and said that developers prioritize certainty in projects and being able to rely on permit approvals based on collaborative process with staff.

**4. Reading File**

There were no comments on the reading file.

**5. Adjourn**

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

Minutes prepared and submitted by Mia Watson, Clerk.