

**TOWN OF ESSEX / CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
JOINT HOUSING COMMISSION
Minutes of December 7, 2022**

City Representatives: Katie Ballard, Chair (arrived at 3:11 PM); Gabrielle Smith, Vice Chair; Ned Daly, Ta-Tanisha Redditta.

Town Representatives: Emily Taylor, Clerk; Deb Flannery; Rupesh Asher; Mark Redmond.

Administration and Staff: Katherine Sonnick (Town, Community Development Director), Greg Duggan (Town, Town Manager), Kent Johnson (Town, Town Planner), Regina Mahoney (City, City Manager).

Public: Lorraine Zaloom

1. CALL TO ORDER AND AGENDA ADDITIONS / CHANGES

Smith called the meeting to order at 3:08 PM. There were no proposed changes to the agenda.

2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

Lorraine Zaloom (Town) is seeking space to brainstorm resources for community members who are unable to report safety concerns in their rental housing that will be followed up on. Ballard appreciates hearing about this concern and while the Commission may not be able to discuss in detail today, it will be a future agenda item.

3. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Minutes

No corrections were made.

Smith made a motion, seconded by Redmond, to approve the minutes of November 2, 2022. The motion passed 7-0.

b. New Commissioner: Deb Flannery

Flannery was appointed by the Select board to represent the Town of Essex. Flannery currently works at Evernorth and has significant background in affordable housing and housing development.

c. New Town Planner: Kent Johnson

Johnson has extensive experience in local government, specifically around transportation and its impact on the broader community, housing, and equity and access. Johnson is curious about looking at the bigger picture of a community and certain components' impact within it.

d. Housing Trust Fund updates and next steps

Ballard's presentation on the Housing Trust Fund (HTF) was well received. Next steps are to identify concrete steps and recommendations for how the HTF can be established and used. Next year makes more sense for obtaining community feedback and voting on implementing the HTF. In the meantime, the HC will offer opportunities for the community to provide feedback on the HTF proposal. Focus will also shift to the Essex HC to develop a similar policy in the Town.

e. Debrief and Takeaways on VHFA Housing Conference

VHFA conference in Burlington was valuable.

Ballard emphasized how helpful a presentation was on understanding zoning policy and how that impacts housing. Town representatives can seek information on zoning from Johnson and Sonnicks; City representatives can access information from Mahoney.

Daly appreciates how data driven the sessions were and recognized an overarching theme that our community needs more housing. Daly sees this as an important area to build on by regularly checking in with Planning Commissions, etc to stay informed and sustain support for our Commission's charge. Ballard agrees and acknowledges the effort the HC has made in sustaining communication.

Ballard noted another theme of bringing equity in and access to housing and feels motivating for the HC to have more involvement in that. Redditta will email the Commission notes and follow up information from related sessions and resource highlights round equity and inclusion.

f. Updates

i. New member outreach

Ballard connected an interested party from the City to staff who provided information on the position. Otherwise, seats are posted online and staff are checking in on submitted applications.

The Town will do a Front Porch Forum post soon and can include information in the Town's newsletter.

Taylor offered to share information with Champlain Housing Trust residents as well as other residents in the Town connected to other housing providers. Taylor will do this before the next HC meeting.

ii. Town Plan work group

Taylor has been connected to the workgroup but sustaining attendance at meetings has been a challenge. Last meeting was before Thanksgiving and the goal is to meet every other Wednesday from 3-4p virtually. Once work in the beginning to identify space for community feedback happens, frequency of meetings will decrease as the Town Plan is revised.

Flannery will work with Taylor on engagement for the workgroup.

iii. City Planning Commission Presentation

Mahoney provided a summary of the City's Planning Commission meeting and wants feedback on where the HC stands on specific programs. The HC wants to engage in more detailed conversation around a Rental Registry and Ordinance and Inspection Program and hopes to have this on the agenda in January 2023. The HC would like to see both programs established in Essex, the City and the Town. Ballard reminded the group that the HC hosted the Fire Department previously to learn more about code enforcement and life and safety standards in housing.

Mahoney confirms a strong desire in the City to go the route of implementing these policies and programs. The City is also planning to build code enforcement staff into their 2024 budget and plans to take a year to develop the position and workload in 2023.

The City now has a Planning Commission (long term planning, zoning bylaws) and a Development Review Board (focus strictly on development review) as of their updated Charter on July 1. This means the Planning Commission would have more capacity to process these projects.

g. Commissioner Comments

Smith wants to think about the Joint Commission separating and the timeline on establishing leadership for the Town's developing Housing Commission. Ballard reiterated the HC's plan to formally separate around April and work with her to develop agendas, facilitate meetings, etc. Ballard has this topic on the agenda for meetings in February to bring this process to the forefront as the HC wraps up discussion on membership and current projects.

The HC is not meeting again in December and the next HC meeting will be Wednesday January 4, 2023 at 3:00pm. Bi-weekly meetings will resume. Scheduling can be discussed again especially for staff.

Sonnick mentions that staff may need to resend meeting invitations and look at how access to the Google Drive folders is set up so current staff and commissioners can access it.

4. Reading File

There was no discussion on the reading file.

5. Adjourn

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 4:30pm.

Minutes prepared and submitted by Emily Taylor, Clerk.