

**HOUSING COMMISSION  
(DRAFT)**

**TOWN OF ESSEX  
HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES  
Wednesday, February 3, 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:** Owiso Makuku, Essex Community Development Director; Robin Pierce, Essex Junction Community Development Director; Darren Schibler, Town Planner; Deana Stoneback, Essex Zoning Administrative Assistant, Sharon Kelley, Essex Zoning Administrator

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

Ballard called the meeting to order at 3:05 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 from January 20, 2021**

Smith commented that the minutes did not accurately reflect some a question she had asked regarding agenda setting and meeting schedule. The original minutes said she had asked “What is expected of the Housing Commission and where Commission should begin”. She clarified that she had asked about setting specific goals for Commission work. Also, Smith noted that the Agenda for February 3 was incorrect, and that she was to present her profile this week, not Ballard.

**Redmond made a motion to approve minutes from January 6, 2021, seconded by McAdoo to approve.**

**b. Discuss survey of neighboring housing commissions**

Commissioners presented their experiences with reaching out to housing commissions in other Vermont towns. They had prepared short summaries of their conversations that could be referred to in the future. Commissioners shared their findings with the group.

Ballard was due to speak with member of Montpelier Committee but had to reschedule the call. She will present at the next meeting.

Smith spoke with Carl Bowen from Hinesburg. Hinesburg development has been hindered by wastewater limitations. The town has an inclusionary zoning policy, but

38 Bowen thought it could be more robust. He said that their group works well with other  
39 town committees and the Selectboard and planning committee level but has not  
40 connected in the broader Community. He encouraged Essex to seek grants and  
41 make connections with other organizations.

42 Redmond spoke with Bob Robbins from the Jericho Housing Committee. They  
43 started only last year and have not yet accomplished much. They have struggled  
44 with committee turnover. Robbins felt that they needed to meet more frequently. The  
45 town has many wealthier residents and there is some NIMBY sentiment that could  
46 hinder development.

47 McAdoo spoke with Heather Carrington, the Economic Development Director of  
48 Winooski, who staffs their housing committee. That have seven very active  
49 members. They began in 2016. Winooski is very diverse and the committee has  
50 focused on outreach. They have their rental registry, which is a great resource for  
51 collecting information to support landlords via an annual survey. The committee also  
52 has a budget. The committee helped establish a Housing Trust Fund, which  
53 landlords can access. The committee also has a housing needs assessment, which  
54 is frequently updated as part of their municipal master plan. The committee has also  
55 encountered NIMBY pushback. Home and rent prices are rising, making Winooski  
56 unaffordable for many working professionals.

57 Redmond stated that Essex could create a rental registry to know more about its  
58 housing stock. Committees that seem to be doing well have extensive knowledge of  
59 their housing needs. Makuku noted that Burlington has a registry but only for  
60 minimum safety standards, not the extensive outreach Winooski is doing. Watson  
61 noted that the Essex Housing Needs Assessment has substantial data on Essex  
62 housing stock already.

63 Watson interviewed Leslie Black-Plumeau on South Burlington's Affordable Housing  
64 Committee, who is also her boss. She said that committee has a high level of  
65 capacity due to several members with experience in housing or municipal  
66 committees. However, Black-Plumeau felt that committee had fallen short due to  
67 NIMBY opposition. South Burlington has built a lot of affordable housing, but it is  
68 concentrated in City Center neighborhood, with other parts closed off to  
69 development. Prices are high. The committee hopes to re-engage with residents and  
70 other city boards. South Burlington has inclusionary zoning in some parts of the city,  
71 but she stressed that incentives have to be carefully thought out to make it work.

72 Smith suggested that Essex could coordinate better with our boards, especially the  
73 Planning Commission. Ballard noted that this was beginning to happen and that the  
74 Commission had been invited to speak with Planning and Economic Development  
75 Commission. She suggested that it would also be helpful to update Housing

76 Commission website with contact information for the public to reach out. Schibler  
77 and Makuku said that this could be arranged, and that Housing Commission  
78 members would receive automatic calendar invitations to Planning Commission  
79 meetings.

80 Einhorn communicated with Pam Brannigan from Shelburne via email. She  
81 answered questions with a written response from entire committee. They have  
82 created a 20-page housing booklet with information for the public. Shelburne also  
83 has some NIMBY issues as well. Einhorn noted that we need to convince public that  
84 affordable housing can be high quality and blend in with the neighborhood.

85 Smith highlighted Shelburne's use of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), which she  
86 felt could be a means of promoting more housing development in Essex and help  
87 people stay in their homes. Pierce said Town has made efforts to make ADUs easier  
88 to permit.

89 Teegarden spoke with representative from the Richmond Committee and emailed  
90 with Town Planner. They are newly formed in August and only meet monthly so have  
91 not made much progress yet. Richmond has received a planning grant to revise  
92 zoning. The committee is currently surveying seniors about interest in downsizing,  
93 and business community to explore workers housing needs. They will share results  
94 with us. Richmond is interested in exploring more regulations on short term rentals.

95

96 **c. Discuss Possible Inclusionary Zoning Subcommittee**

97 Not discussed due to lack of time. Will be moved to next meeting on February 17.

98

99 **d. Review Housing Needs Assessment**

100 Redmond asked if Commission feels that they have enough data to move forward  
101 with what is currently available from Essex Housing Needs Assessment. Watson felt  
102 that they did have enough to at least begin exploring recommendations made in  
103 Assessment. McAdoo asked for more resources on Inclusionary Zoning. Schibler  
104 said he would add it to the reading file.

105

106 **e. Invitation to Village Planning Commission's Feb. 4th meeting**

107 Ballard volunteered to attend next meeting to introduce herself and the Housing  
108 Commission's work.

109

110 **f. Commissioner Profile: Gabrielle Smith**

111 Smith shared her interest in increasing resident engagement in local decision-  
112 making and has been involved in the community Heart and Soul initiative in Essex.  
113 Has worked for the Orton Family Foundation. She is concerned that Essex is too  
114 expensive for young families. She was raised in New York, lived in Wisconsin for  
115 several years for college and worked in state government. She moved to Vermont  
116 for family.

117

118 **4. Adjourn**

119 Smith volunteered to take notes during the next meeting. **Ballard adjourned the**  
120 **meeting at 3:42 PM.**

121

122 Minutes submitted by Mia Watson, Clerk.