

**TOWN OF ESSEX / CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
JOINT HOUSING COMMISSION
Minutes of March 15, 2023**

City Representatives: Katie Ballard, Chair; Gabrielle Smith, Vice Chair; Ned Daly.

Town Representatives: Rupesh Asher; Deb Flannery; Mark Redmond.

Administration and Staff: Kent Johnson, Regina Mahoney, Katherine Sonnicks, Chris Yuen.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Ballard called the meeting to order at 3:02 PM. There were no proposed changes to the agenda.

2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

There was no public to be heard.

3. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Approval of Minutes

Smith made a motion, seconded by Daly, to approve the minutes of March 1, 2023. The motion passed 5-0-1.

b. Housing Trust Fund Discussion

Smith provided a review of the March 1 conversation around discussing each item the HTF could be used for, referencing Yuen's chart to break each item down. Yuen stated he could provide more context on the fourth column, which reflected conversation amongst Commissioners about what they felt would be low, medium, or high priority to use the HTF for. Flannery agreed that it was reflective of the last meeting's conversation. Ballard appreciated the context and proposed for future meetings, that more information about discussion topics is reviewed.

Ballard clarified that Staff would not be running the HTF group or items it would potentially fund and that a separate group would oversee the HTF. Based on that clarification, Yuen further explained that column two would show staff time needed per HTF topic assuming Staff would be heavily involved. Johnson confirmed that there is not additional capacity among Staff, beyond supporting Commission meetings and doing preliminary research into conversation topics, to support major projects put forward by the HC; Ballard reinforced that the HC does not have expectations that Staff are taking on more for the HC and that if the HTF moves forward, there would be a proposal to increase Staff capacity. Johnson sees a detailed proposal for funding and specific objectives of the HTF would be the next thing to bring back to the Select Board and/or Planning Commission.

Ballard added context that the Select Board liked the idea of the HTF and noted they would not look at it within the first year following separation. Once potential uses were narrowed down, the HC would review other HTFs in the State to research funding amounts and sources, and then finally identify the funding mechanism to build the HTF. The next proposal to the Select Board would outline all of these details. After separation, each Commission will need to carry the conversation forward for their respective community. The timeline to re-present to the City Council and Select Board would be late Summer 2023 into early Fall 2023, and they also hoped we'd obtain community feedback, which informs our discussion to schedule outreach sessions in

the community. Johnson appreciated this background and agreed there is staff capacity to support what the Select Board and Planning Commission would want to see, while also working to move other items that are a priority for the HC forward. Ballard also cites that we are months away from separation and still need to get structures in place to separate and move these topics forward for the City and for the Town.

Coming back to the HTF topics, Smith wondered if there were any other topics the HC wanted to review. Smith would like to separate supportive housing and low-barrier funding for prevention services, Ballard agreed, and Yuen said he can update the priority list to make them two objectives again. Ballard was surprised they were lower priority on the list as other HTFs do not offer this service and the HC has talked about this being a priority for a long time. Flannery offered that from last meeting, a comment was made that the HTF distributing funds directly to households at risk wouldn't support the need for reciprocal funds. Ballard clarified that parameters could be added around how often households could request funds or how much they could apply for. Smith thinks that having this service available would have a large impact on the community to keep families and individuals in their homes and to reduce the impacts of experiencing homelessness or living in at-risk status.

Johnson reiterated that last meeting's discussion was through the lens of what a municipality could support and echoes what Smith and Ballard have mentioned that by serving individual households, there will be a boarder positive impact on the community, and how to go about making it feasible for our community. Yuen specifies the third column in his notes noted the benefits and challenges of each item through discussion with the HC. Yuen is updating the list and supports separating prevention services and low-barrier funds for homelessness prevention. Ballard also cautions against stating some HTF uses are "duplicative" of existing programs because the intention through the HC would be to make eligibility more accessible to serve populations that might not be able to access existing services. Flannery offers that the HTF would be set up to build an asset through continued funds coming into the Trust Fund and offered perspective that there is an existing fragmented system of financial assistance supports and could cause more confusion or not guarantee the appropriate eligible population has access to the funds and offered that working towards a permanent asset that can continue to grow would be a benefit. Ballard would like to look more into that model as she hadn't seen a HTF set up in that way.

Smith offered that the joint HC might want to wait until after separation to look into details of this as she also believes a sustainable HTF is best and through her advocacy in the City, would like to see a mix of what Flannery and Ballard are discussing around the HTF. Smith also wonders where the HC is at with separation since the HC had planned to separate around April and Smith is curious what the Town and the City want to see their respective Commissions work on. Johnson agrees that each Commission may approach projects differently and thinks talking about

Johnson and Yuen will check on advertisement for vacancies on the HC, especially through Front Porch Forum and respective websites. There is an existing ad in place that can be used. The City has four of five representatives filled, if everyone currently serving on the Commission seeks reappointment. The Town will have three of five positions filled if everyone seeks reappointment; Ballard shared that Redmond is not planning to seek reappointment. Mahoney confirmed that the ad for vacancies can be reposted.

- c. Housing Commission outreach
Housing Commission outreach was not reviewed at today's meeting.
- d. Updates on HC presentation to the City's Planning Commission
This agenda item was not reviewed at today's meeting.

e. Housing Commission Separation

Taylor (not present at today's meeting) has reached out to Ballard to understand the role and responsibilities of the Chair position on the HC. Makeup of the Commission has changed since separation was voted on and there are still vacancies. A focused discussion on Separation might be better for end of April or May. Johnson offered that focusing on recruitment and advertising the vacancies might be the best place to start. Efforts would be better focused on the Town's vacancies. Smith advocated for a social media push of advertising as well, noting that social media groups are effective in this community; both entities are in need of members. Ballard asked Staff if quorum could be adjusted once separation is final, as the Commission Charters will be adjusted. Separation needs to happen by July 1, 2023.

Upon separation, the City will need a Clerk. The Town needs to identify a Chair, Vice-Chair, and a Clerk. Concerns are shared within the Commission that even if temporary officers can't be identified to fill these roles while vacancies are advertised, there may not be sufficient governing structure to effectively separate and move forward with separation. Ballard asked Asher and Flannery if they are willing to take on a leadership position within the Commission; Asher and Flannery both confirmed they are willing to in order to help the Commission.

Johnson will look into advertisements for the vacancy seats, adjusted charter and quorum, and whether or not it's been decided what the Charter and quorums would be. Ballard shared our ideal was to have seven members on each Commission, with a quorum of four members present. Ballard asked to know that for sure for the next meeting so we can move forward with other policies the Joint Commission is working on. Yuen shared he will also check on these items from the City's perspective as well.

Smith advocated that Separation should be the first topic on the next meeting's agenda so we can talk through details of roles, how to separate, when to separate, and discuss all of that while acknowledging the HC is behind where it thought it'd be at this time.

Smith also offered that it may make sense to vote on the HTF priorities separately because it might not make sense to move forward with them as a joint HC where separation is coming up in three months, and wants to ensure both entities are prepared to move forward formally after July 1, 2023. Ballard clarifies that co-positions can be identified but formal appointments can't be made until Charters are adjusted.

Ballard is open to answering questions from any Commissioner thinking about taking on leadership positions within the Commission.

- f. Updates from Staff, if applicable
This agenda item was not reviewed at today's meeting.
- g. Town Plan Workgroup update, if applicable
- h. There was no update on the Town Plan Workgroup.

4. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

5. READING FILE

There was no discussion on the reading file.

6. ADJOURN

CHAIR adjourned the meeting at 4:33pm.

Minutes prepared and submitted by Emily Taylor, Clerk.