

**TOWN OF ESSEX / CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
JOINT HOUSING COMMISSION
Minutes of March 1, 2023**

City Representatives: Gabrielle Smith, Vice Chair; Ned Daly, Ta-Tanisha Redditta.

Town Representatives: Emily Taylor, Clerk; Deb Flannery; Mark Redmond (left at 4:00 pm).

Administration and Staff: Regina Mahoney (arrived at 3:14 pm), Katherine Sonnack, Chris Yuen.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Smith called the meeting to order at 3:10 PM. There were no proposed changes to the agenda.

2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

Jean MacBride from the Essex Reporter is present at today's meeting.

3. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Approval of Minutes

Taylor made a motion, seconded by Flannery, to approve the minutes of February 15, 2023. Smith requested an amendment the minutes to clarify that she was appointed to her seat in 2022 for a three year term. Taylor corrected the minutes and resubmitted to staff. The motion passed 6-0.

b. Review Housing Trust Fund (HTF) Presentation

Commissioners did not comments on the HTF presentation.

c. Current Priorities for HTF

Staff reviewed the purposed uses of the HTF in the presentation slides to assess what uses are the most realistic for the municipalities to move forward.

- Subsidies or grants to make existing units ADA compliant;
 - o It seems more likely that renovations or modifications to make existing units more ADA compliant would be grant based.
- Grants for alterations to existing homes to create new housing units, including accessory dwelling units (ADUs);
 - o A revolving loan fund would be more effort, but would make more sense to address this item.
- Subsidies for weatherization upgrades;
 - o Similar program already exists so staff would recommend focusing on marketing for those programs.
- Subsidies for affordable units within otherwise market rate development projects;
 - o The City is already pursuing inclusionary zoning, so this may not be an additional necessary effort.
- Down payment assistance for first time home buyers;
 - o Similar programs already exist so staff recommend focusing on marketing for those programs.
- Supportive housing for those experiencing homelessness, domestic abuse victims, substance abuse recovery, and low-barrier funding for homelessness prevention;
 - o Similar programs exist so staff would recommend focusing on marketing. However, a majority of these services are based in Burlington. The City could potentially help recruit but not sure if the HTF would support this.

- It's not likely that a municipality would take on a direct service role like this.
- Purchase/preparation of land for affordable housing projects;
 - In other areas with high vacancy, abandoned buildings, etc., this would have more potential. If the HTF is significant in size, it might be possible for the municipality to purchase new property for this use.
 - Taylor is in favor of supporting this item based on feedback from the Town Plan workgroup and Town residents. There was a larger volume of feedback to reuse or repurpose currently vacant or underutilized buildings or commercial spaces.
- Municipally funded construction of housing;
 - HC has already agreed this option is not feasible given foreseeable funds.
- Low interest loans for renovations and repairs required by City Rental Registry.
 - There may be efficiencies in merging the registry program and HTF, such that the funds are offered to finance remedial actions in exchange for rent stabilization.

Johnson is not present today and has been the primary staff support on this topic, so we will revisit his perspective at the next HC meeting. Smith asked each Commissioner to rank the top 3 uses of the HTF and Yuen kept track in his notes, referenced above.

d. Housing Commission Outreach Events and Scheduling

The HC would like to host various outreach events beginning with a general feedback and education form on the HC and its responsibilities, as well as a specific outreach event around the HTF. Taylor offered that Spring may be the best time to begin scheduling if the HC wants to host anything in outdoor spaces. Smith agreed and notes it may be best to host sessions before the end of the academic year. There could be funds from the Town for refreshments, but not to rent out any spaces. There are a handful of free spaces throughout the Town and City that could be utilized. The HC will revisit this topic again on March 15, 2023 and will discuss in more detail the format, location, and times of the events. Things to think about: days to host meetings, times of day, tabling or meeting format, in person or online or hybrid, what we want to get out of the meetings and what we want the community to get out of the meeting, etc.

e. Staff Updates

From the Town, the work plan group continues to compile feedback and purpose updates to the Town Plan. The group is developing word clouds, and trying to boil down the volume of feedback received into actionable items that can be incorporated in the Town Plan.

From the City, Daly and Ballard will be presenting updates from the HC to the Planning Commission next week. Yuen says they will also be updated on what will happen after separation. The HC will need to revisit separation discussions soon as it had anticipated separating, but still collaborating, in April, which is approaching quickly.

f. Town Plan Workgroup Updates, if applicable

The workgroup continues to compile feedback to purpose updates to the Town Plan. Town Meeting is next week and there will be an update on progress then as well.

4. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

There were no comments made by Commissioners.

5. READING FILE

There was no discussion on the reading file.

6. ADJOURN

Smith adjourned the meeting at 4:10pm.

Minutes prepared and submitted by Emily Taylor, Clerk.