

Low and Moderate Income Housing Development Task Force

Monday, April 25, 2022 - 11:00 am

Jim Monty - Chairman

Chairman Monty called this task force to order at 11:00 am with the following in attendance: Clayton Barber, Derek Doty, Ken Hughes, Jim Monty, Tom Scozzafava, Mark Wright, Krissy Leerkes, Dan Manning, Mike Mascarenas, Terri Morse, Anna Reynolds, Bruce Misarski and Carol Calabrese. Charlie Harrington, Joe Pete Wilson, Alan Jones, and Brook Ripper-Clark were absent. Roy Holzer and Bruce Misarski had been previously excused.

Also present: Alyssa Bartlett - PRIDE of Ticonderoga and Dina Garvey

News Media present: Tim Rowland - Sun Community News

MONTY: Thank you all for coming. I handed out some information that I've collected so far from some of the communities as to what their needs are, or what they see as their needs within their community. I'm trying to get a response from as many of the communities that I can, so that we can look at a broad picture of Essex County, because like we've talked about, I don't believe one size fits all here. I think you're going to find 18 sizes fits all. There will be a lot of similarities, but as many similarities there will be differences and I think that's something that's going to have to be looked at when we move forward on this.

Also, Ken has prepared the, began to prepare the application. He sent it out for some input. Ken, would you like to share somethings? Mike just headed up to see if Dan Manning might be able available to come down and answer any questions for us, as well. Do you want to wait to see if Dan can come, Ken?

HUGHES: I can blab a little bit. So, I put in front of you a copy of the Land Bank Program Application that actually, Jim had downloaded and presented to us and I just put it up on a Google Doc and I know several of you in the room have contributed to this already and it's really a working document, it's very draft. I tried, personally, to fill in as much as I think I know and, but as I was telling the Supervisors just a few moments ago, my intelligence only goes to here and we need to get to here and so that's why I'm really glad we have a nice diverse group of professionals in intelligence and backgrounds in the room, because hopefully the combination of all our minds in the room will help us fill in the blanks of much of this and I know a lot of it remains, potentially, unanswerable, right now. It looks like the Land Bank Application really would like to know about what the structure of the land bank would be and I know a lot of times the land bank structure is a non-profit, 501c3 and I don't believe that's the immediate short term goal of what we're looking at and please correct me, if I'm wrong, I think ultimately that's where we would like to go, but because we're so, we're just very conservative about our approach with that, we may have to provide a different answer in that box, but, again, I put this in front of you on paper, because sometimes paper is better than electronic and it's easy to kind of move pass that inbox message, but it really would behoove this Committee to take a look and just brain dump onto this document what you are thinking what would be best. It might spark some other creative answers from other people. I thank all of you that have been able to contribute to this so far and I thank all of you who will be able to contribute to it and like I said, there are no wrong answers, but we're just going to need to fill in these boxes, ultimately to be able to get an answer. So, I don't know if anybody has any questions about the application. I am happy to try and answer them, I can send out the link

again to anybody that needs to link. So, does anybody have any questions about what you're seeing so far? I don't have a lot of answers, we were just talking, the thing that keeps me up at 2:30 in the morning is how are we going to pay for it? Who's going to be involved? Prevailing wage and this and that and the other thing and that's where I just don't know.

MASCARENAS: I'm good with that.

HUGHES: Oh good, I need people to say, I'm good with those parts. That's awesome. And I can say that the land bank is starting to get some really good press. So, just to give you background, North Country Public Radio picked up this story. They have a little texting club and I'm part of that texting club and they asked the question, what are the things that are, which one of these three things are priority to you? And they just asked as a human being and I said, housing #3, bam and they wrote back and said, we'd like to know more about what you think your housing concerns are. So, I said the housing concerns are this and here is a solution that is potentially, possibly in the works and they wrote me back and said, housing was the number one response from the text message system of North Country Public Radio. So, you can think about the reach, right? And they said, you were the only one, you were the only response of an actionable item that could be done to solve all the questions and all the concerns that exist. So, that's why they picked up a story and I didn't want it to be so much about Ken Hughes and land banks, I tried to get Jim Monty involved and Mike Mascarenas and did they call you guys?

MASCARENAS: They absolutely did.

HUGHES: Okay, good. So, I'm glad they called and of course when something gets on North Country Public Radio, it gets picked up on various newspapers and actually the Capital Press Room. I don't know if you guys are aware of Capital Press Room? They emailed last week and asked if they could do a 15-minute radio interview and I said, I got to talk to the Chairman. I don't want to do it by myself, I am happy to do it, but I want to share the love, I want to see the love shared here. But, so the good news here is that the word's getting out. That across the North Country they're hearing that Essex County is actually doing something about a land bank within the Blue Line and that's really, really exciting for all the reasons that we've already discussed and so if anybody wants to be a part of that interview let me know. But, that is another way to get the word out to our constituents in Essex County that their public officials and those that work at Essex County are actually doing something to attempt to solve this housing crisis that we have. That's all I can say.

MONTY: I'd like to echo that Ken, because I received several emails since this has started from people in the community that are very interested and pleased that Essex County is looking at this. Is it something that's going to be solved overnight? Absolutely not, but it's something that needs to be looked at and to try to help the people within the community and before I further, we have Alyssa Bartlett.

BARTLETT: Correct

MONTY: And she's with?

BARTLETT: PRIDE of Ticonderoga.

MONTY: PRIDE of Ticonderoga. She requested to be here, welcome. You're welcome to come to any of our meetings and offer any input you have. I gave you a paper on some of the communities I asked to get, send me a narrative on what they think their communities need for housing, where they see things we can do, what we can't do. Had some great responses, we really appreciate it, I know the rest of my colleagues are going to get that information to me, as well.

Also, in there, Alyssa, was an application for the land bank that we're looking at starting. So, that's there. Would you like to tell us a little bit about yourself and your role?

BARTLETT: So, I am the Executive Director of PRIDE of Ticonderoga. We also work with the Town of Ticonderoga to help them move their priorities forward from a community standpoint, within our organization we're working on housing rehab projects for low income households and try to do what we can to preserve and protect affordable housing in the Ticonderoga area. We participate in regional discussions, as other organizations have and really I am just here today to kind of catch up to speed with where you're all at and listen and learn and then do whatever homework we need to, to provide our input and assist the Town of Ticonderoga and the County or other partners, as necessary. I am here for a support role.

MONTY: Good, thank you.

HUGHES: That's really great, I just want to jump in, because a lot of non-governmental organizations have been talking about land banks and how to do it, but they also respect, they also understand that this Body, right here, is the one that's actually going to pull the trigger on it. I would also like to say that many of our more dense population centers, Wilmington, North Elba, Keene, to a certain extent are already looking at their own housing, localized housing needs and their own kind of authorities and things like that. So, there may be something that Ti can do unto itself, but it could also be something that a potential land bank of Essex County can do to support your effort.

BARTLETT: Excellent.

MONTY: And also I would like to add for the non-governmental people sitting in this room, please send me your thoughts, HAPEC, Office of the Aging, Community Resources, Ti and I know I've already shared several from Terri, of her thoughts and needs for the community, but if you want to send me something to my email, I can plug it into the package that we're going to present to the Board and you as being partners here, I think, and Mike, Social Services, as well, that would be great information for the rest of the Supervisors not seated here. So, please I'd welcome that.

MASCARENAS: Yeah, I'll just introduce Mr. Manning quickly.

MONTY: Yup

MASCARENAS: Not that he needs introduction, but I want to kind of, I had talked to him previously, but I kind of pulled him out of something else and he was gracious enough to give us

his time this morning. So, when you look at this land bank application stuff, a lot of this is going to be a work in process and it's going to take some time and energy, you know, there's a lot going on. Resolutions have to be passed by the Board. Local Laws that would have to be arrived at, those types of things. Anybody's who's listened to me or forced to listened to me this whole time, I really don't want to let the tax sale opportunity pass us by to get started; right? We haven't been able to have tax sales in quite some time, due to Covid and we know that those are going to be coming down the pike here, pretty soon. So, a thought I had a couple of weeks back and I shared with Jim and I shared with Ken and I spoke to Dan Manning about was when those tax sales happen and we take ownership of those properties, could be potentially, one thing I have been hearing from Bruce, because I've worked with him, a little bit, on the CDBG projects, recently, is that they don't have homes to buy; right? So, they have people that are qualified, they're subsidized, but there's no homes for them to buy and anybody that goes on Zillow is going to find that out pretty quickly, that there's simply no homes to buy. So, one thought I had, was if we could take, just as a pilot type project, to see how it worked, if we could take a home from the tax sale or two, see what they are like, you know have our code guy go out, do those inspections, see what they're like, potentially we could shop them to your clientele; right? So, that we could, do they want them, do they not want them, but it might work out in a way that helps your clientele that can't find housing. They certainly can't go to an auction and buy it, because they don't have that cash in front of them to pay, but if we sold it during a private sale, you would subsidize it. We would probably make out better as a County in terms of what we get on that property and we would be meeting the goal of our Committee, which is to put people in housing that they can afford long-term. So, that was one thought I had, I did speak to Dan Manning about that in terms of conditions that we could put on sales, those types of things and from my conversation with Dan, it sounded pretty positive. So, now I'll guess I'll shoot it to you.

MANNING: Okay, sure, first of all, I'm a little bit, Dan Tedford was responsible for this Committee and he's done on the legwork, but he's since gone, so now Bill Tansey will be in on this. So, as far as land bank questions, I do remember reading the statute about 6 months ago, so, I am a little cold. As far as the tax sale is concerned, any properties that you deem necessary for your purposes can be pulled from the tax sale. It doesn't have to go to auction, it can be sold. There are four different ways that tax properties can be sold and one is at a private sale, which is what this would fall into. So, what we can do, is you can flag properties or a property, if you're starting small from the list of the properties that have been conveyed to the County, prior to tax sale and we can leave those out of the auction and then you can go forward with soliciting appropriate buyers; which would have to be an open solicitation. It can't be given to just one person, it has to be, the market has to bear out, you can then sell it to that person and take out a mortgage like you do with your low income stuff. Yeah, I think that would be the easiest way to do it, sell it to them and have them use a mortgage and the mortgage would probably mimic what we see with the CDBG stuff and this will all have to be in local law, but if you feel that you want to mimic that, if we're using that funding, I think we could mimic that. If not, you could put those conditions in and that way it's a descending payback. You know, if the person should sell the property or otherwise have, you know, during the first five years, this much is owed, the first seven years. So, rather than go on the point here is, we can pull property from the tax sale and we can sell it at private sale and you could go for it. The thing is where would you get the money and I think you're thinking with Bruce?

MASCARENAS: Well, I was thinking that we might be able to meet two goals, at once here; right? We've got people that are qualified that can't find housing and at the same time, a lot of times, these properties at tax sales, that are in that mid-level range don't sell for fair market value; right? Where we simply sell them for pennies on the dollars to get it back on the tax roll without necessarily warranting, you know, getting what that fair market value is for that property. So, I think it would meet two goals, but I think the money in terms of that would kind of be a wash in terms of the County. But, another question, Dan and we had went over this and I know we can do, I know we've done it, can the County and take those properties and demo if necessary?

MANNING: Yes

MASCARENAS: Right, can the County take those properties and remodel?

MANNING: Yup

MASCARENAS: So...

MANNING: The problem with remodeling though, is prevailing wage, things of that nature. So, you know, there's a difference between construction remodeling and just shifting it over under a mortgage, you know, you don't have that expense.

MASCARENAS: Right

MANNING: If you're thinking down that line, maybe, you know I would have to think about how we could get around those types of issues.

HUGHES: Is a way to get around that, if the County hired a small crew of people to work under the, as DPW employees who were specifically focused on doing that remodeling work?

MANNING: Yeah, I thought you were going somewhere else with that. Yeah, you can do that.

SCOZZAFAVA: So, just so I understand, so the County would pull the property, a house out of the tax sale? At that point, we, the County government would go in and rehab the house or would we turn that property over to the Housing or the land bank?

MASCARENAS: We don't have a land bank, yet, Tom.

SCOZZAFAVA: There's a huge difference there and I think it's a slippery slope when you start, you know, you've got to be careful on this thing. As you know, Dan and Mike, I've been involved in a couple of them in Moriah and when you get into the environmental issues of asbestos and lead paint and so on, I mean, you're talking, you're at \$100,000.00 before you even blink an eye on a single story house. So, it was my understanding that if the property, the County would pull properties out of the tax sale, correct me if I'm wrong to turn them over to the land bank and then they would go in and do the...

HUGHES: You're close, my interpretation is that the land bank has the authority from the legislature to pull that property from the tax sale.

MANNING: Really?

MASCARENAS: They have to seek permission of the Board. The County is the owner.

HUGHES: Okay, but there is a relationship there.

MASCARENAS: Yes

HUGHES: There's a relationship there and then the land bank, as its own non-profit has staff, project manager, executive director and they use their own criteria to do what you're talking about. They may say, that house is filled with asbestos, we don't want that, because we can't afford to fix it and in the short term, we may say the same thing. If we find that a piece of property off of that tax sale, that we take ownership of, like Mr. Manning has spoken about and then send Seth Celotti up there, or actually Seth would check it out, potentially beforehand, if we're interested and Seth says, no, this is not something that is going to be a knock out of the park and then we would potentially pass on that, because there's just too much overhead.

MANNING: I think when you're talking land bank, I think you're talking about...

MASCARENAS: What I'm talking about, Tom, is prior to land bank establishment. We're going to have this major tax sale. One of your concerns that you keep bringing up and rightfully so, is these properties keep getting revisited at tax auction, right? They keep going in there, they keep coming up every tax auction and nothing happens with them. One major thing I would like to do is maybe tear a few of them down that are zombie properties, that are derelict properties and at least have a vacant lot, that's more valuable than what's sitting there. But, maybe there's an opportunity for a home that maybe doesn't have a lot work to be done to it, that's decent. The last tax sale, talk about Moriah in particular, Center Road had two or three properties that were in nice livable shape. Do we have to do any work to those? No, we don't. Maybe we can pull one of them and try and sell it in private sale.

SCOZZAFAVA: They sold and the people that purchased them, went in and had and the means to do something with them. The issue that I find in my community, is that these houses are sold at tax sale for little of nothing and the people purchasing them have the best intentions in the world to do something with it, but they don't have the financial resources.

MASCARENAS: But, did those houses sell at fair market value? I don't know the answer to that.

SCOZZAFAVA: And the other end of the spectrum that you have the, you know, the not so desirable landlords that come in and buy these properties and rent them out until the next tax sale and never pay and taxes, never pay any water, never pay any sewer and I am not saying every landlord, but there are some out there that play that game. I think we do have a handle on that now, by eliminating them from tax sales.

MASCARENAS: So, I think this group would like to at least be able to do something at the next tax sale, being that there's going to be a lot of property that's going to be out there due to how long it's been since our last one. How do we do that, and can we legally do that prior to establishing the land bank is what are questions really are, for Mr. Manning, right now.

SCOZZAFAVA: So, identifying the properties that have potential, I mean, the properties that were built, homes that were built in 60's, 70's, onward, they usually sell pretty well and then people buy them and go in and do something with them. It's the ones prior to that, that become the issue. So, if we go in there and the first thing we're going to have to do, before we jump in too deep, in my opinion, you've got to do some kind of environmental assessment on these properties, so we don't get in too deep.

MANNING: They have to do that on every single one.

MASCARENAS: Yeah

SCOZZAFAVA: And then once you do that, of course, now you've just shot yourself in the foot at the sale.

MASCARENAS: The thing is, too, Tom, I think this is the low, this is affordable housing committee, so what I'm speaking to is a little wrinkle on it, is that group of individuals that can't go to your auction, because they don't have liquid. They can pay the down payment, but they subsidized through Bruce's programs to help with closing costs, to help with down payment, to do those types of things and those people can't even show up, you might actually get better value for the home at an auction, hard saying, because you get fair market value for the house, but it's meeting our goal of getting those people that are our residents that want to live here and be here long term that are established, families into a home, long-term. So, I think that's probably a little bit of a difference, but I only want to do it with maybe one home, to do like a pilot. I'm not saying we're going to take all these homes all over the County and do this, long-term. That's not our goal, we want to see if it works, if it's successful and can we start dealing with some of the blight issues that are monopolizing our communities.

SCOZZAFAVA: I have a ½ dozen, right now, in the Town of Moriah that I'll gladly turn over to Bruce, tomorrow.

HUGHES: Tom, just to go back to what you were saying, I think, at least the vision that I have, is that the County is going to mimic the functionality of a land bank in the short-term, we just want to mimic it, so that we can test it out. We just want to mimic it, before we go through the process of creating, somebody creates that 501c3 and all the stuff that you got to do with that, but we don't want to, I don't necessarily want the thing to happen until we know that we're successful with that one and then two and then three and then now we've got some momentum. Let us get some momentum, then we can tackle the way that is actually should be with that structure.

MONTY: Now, those three homes that you talked about in Moriah, Tom, were they purchased by locals who are going to be permanently there or were they purchased as second homes? Where they purchased to be AirBnBs?

SCOZZAFAVA: They were, I believe, Mike correct me, if I'm wrong, I think those were locals.

MASCARFENAS: I think those were, but that's a great point, Jim. Because, that's not what's happening.

MONTY: That's not what this group is about, at all. We're not doing this for second homes. We're not doing this for AirBnbs, for rentals. We're doing it for residents who can't get in a home.

MASCARENAS: Right and so I guess, Dan, did you get all of that?

MANNING: Yeah, you can condition the sale, you can put restrictive covenants on your deed that prohibit it for being used for those purposes.

MONTY: Oh, absolutely.

MANNING: For a certain period of time or whatever you want to do.

HUGHES: I think some of the land banks, actually said, you've got to be in that house, or they expect you to be in that house for an X number of hours per week or months per year or something like that. That does exist.

MASCARENAS: One other thing that I brought up to Dan is, if we do demo a property, let's say and make a lot vacant, can we, if we sell the lot, can we put a restriction in that deed that says, within X amount of years, you need to build a home or whatever that need is, needs to be on that lot and he said, we could. So, maybe that's another mechanism that, relatively low cost, depending on the County exposure, in terms of hazardous materials and tipping things and all those fun things.

MONTY: And I think, as far as clearing lots and demoing lots, that lot has to be approved for something to be rebuilt or it makes no sense for us to go and, really other than cleanup.

MASCARENAS: Yeah, I think we would stick to the hamlets.

MONTY: Right, well, I get nothing.

MANNING: I do just want to say one thing, before I forget, on the tax sale, there is a 14-day right of repurchase granted to delinquent tax payers, 14 days before the actual scheduled auction date. If they come to pay their taxes, ahead of time, then all bets are off and so, the County would re-convey the property to them. So, that would have to be addressed, because you don't want to have a situation where you looked at a piece of property, you've got all your hopes up and let's say you haven't done anything yet, but you've gone in and then this person comes in 14 days prior to the auction and pays up.

MASCARENAS: I think we would wait until everything was final.

MANNING: Okay

MONTY: It doesn't mean that we can't go and have Seth look at them and say, identifying the properties that maybe and then after the 14 days, then you move forward with it.

MANNING: Yup

MORSE: Just the idea about the vacant land opportunities that might pose themselves. Is there any possibility that we could form a relationship with Habitat for Humanity, so that they can be the housing, housing part of the equation?

MONTY: I've already had that conversation.

MORSE: You know we like working with them.

MONTY: I've had that conversation and they are willing to sit down with us and look at these things.

MORSE: Awesome.

MASCARENAS: Now, Bruce, from what we've said, does everything make sense to you? Because, I haven't got a chance to talk to you about this.

MISARSKI: It does make sense. First of all, whoever's going to do the work, wants to have site control. Somebody's got to, whoever's going to be there redeveloping, needs to own it and take the risk. You know, this is a risky, redeveloping these properties is, you can blow a lot of money.

MASCARENAS: You also have access to rehabilitation funds; correct?

MISARSKI: Yeah, we probably, we would probably use our own funds to, because then we're going to be selling the house; right? So, we would receive it, we would use HAPEC funds to, you know, put in a \$100,000.00 or more to fix it up. In the meantime, finding an eligible homebuyer. The homebuyer would provide their subsidy is usually the in the down payment, closing cost assistance, so that could reduce the principal, but they're going to be buying this thing at a \$200,000.00, we're getting it, putting, whatever \$150,000.00 into this, they're going to have to get a mortgage, they're going to get subsidy to purchase the unit and then HAPEC would then be selling it to them using our funds. So, that's normally what a developer would do. They use their funds to develop a property and then they would sell it, they would have site control of the property.

MASCARENAS: So, if we turned the property over to you?

MISARSKI: Yeah, we would take it, we would renovate it, using HAPEC's cash reserves and find a homebuyer, put them through the homebuyer process, so it would be a low/moderate income family that would be purchasing the property. They would be, they'd have at least a 10 year deferred payment loan, you know affordability restriction, so if they sold it within X amount of years, they would have to pay back some of it. We could even, if we needed more subsidy, go to

Adirondack Community Action Trust and have they actually buy the land under it; which would bring another \$30,000.00 out of sale price to the family, because then that way the trust would be holding the property and would be permanently affordable at that point and maybe the County would want permanent affordability, rather than just temporarily affordability, if we're going to go to that level and have these houses, it's nice to have permanent affordability that will also be there for low and moderate income families, versus helping one family and then, it's probably, the house would probably still stay in the market as a working class family home, but you don't know. A lot of these properties are just getting sold to second homeowners and then it kind of becomes unaffordable for the folks that live here, that part of the market is. Yeah, so the family would receive a subsidy of say, \$50,000.00 to purchase the place, HAPEC would take the risk to fix it up and turn it over the family, it makes all the sense and we could do, only probably one or two a year.

MASCARENAS: Right, I don't think our goals are that big; right, right now. I think we're trying to get our feet under us.

MANNING: There might a problem with giving the property to HAPEC.

MASCARENAS: Right

MANNING: Because, they're non-for-profit. They're not a municipality. If it was a municipality we could give it for free, but we have to get the highest and best price that we can for the property. So, we would have to work around that a little bit, I am sure that we can, but it's an issue.

DOTY: Let's assume we're going to move ahead in this current year and try for two properties, what does the County have for a deadline now, for this foreclosure list, auction list?

MANNING: We should...

DOTY: Is it September?

MANNING: I would say it would be no later than September.

DOTY: Okay and I'm still confused, how does the County acquire the property? Do we need seed money before Bruce gets it?

MANNING: No

MONTY: The properties are foreclosed on. They become County property.

MASCARENAS: We pay the warrant.

MONTY: We pay the warrant.

DOTY: But, let's just say it's one of these teardown properties and we want to go in and demo it before Bruce qualifies someone.

MASCARENAS: Yup

DOTY: How is that done?

MASCARENAS: My initial presentation to this group was that we would start with ARPA money, that we have a significant amount of that.

DOTY: Okay

MASCARENAS: That we could dive into and if the Board thought it was worthwhile, then we could visit it in future budget years, as something that was important.

DOTY: I can say initially, for a form of success, I can see an equation working where it is a property where there's a demo of zombie house, whatever you want to call it, because the fastest growing aspect of residential housing, that I have seen is in the modular home industry. Where the costs are concrete and to qualify people is very attainable. So, certainly I think if we start out with a direction that is something that can prove itself, we will be a long ways of proving this whole system, if you will. I'm nervous, like Tom, in acquiring properties that are going to bury us before we can prove our direction.

MONTY: But, we don't have to acquire them. We can cherry pick.

HUGHES: We'll cherry pick.

DOTY: Right

MONTY: We can cherry pick those properties. We're not just going to take every property that's there.

HUGHES: We're cherry picking the properties that we can have success.

DOTY: I agree and I didn't realize that a person can retain their property as close as 2 weeks before.

MONTY: But, again, it's a process. It's a process, we go, we find the properties that we want to look at. We send Seth out if it's going to a rehab or whatever. Seth will come back and say, aye or nay, whether it's worth it or not and then, okay, we wait for that 14-day period and then on the 13th day, we can begin the process.

HUGHES: And I'd like to say, I'm glad a private citizen has that much leeway to keep their property.

MONTY: Absolutely.

HUGHES: I mean that's good, that's a good thing.

MANNING: Yeah, some counties don't allow that.

MONTY: We're not here to take people's properties.

HUGHES: Right, we're not here to take people's property. I do not, personally, want government to get in the way of private capitalism and those private sales.

DOTY: I just wanted to know the rules.

HUGHERS: No, absolutely, but when the time does come, and all of those opportunities have been exhausted, we can then step in to take a look where opportunities are.

MANNING: So, what does happen is in the foreclosure, just to boil it down, three months before what's called the redemption date, we send out a notice of petition, put in the paper, we do all this stuff, we post; that lets everybody know. The landowner will get a notice in the mail, hey, you have three months to pay up or you're done, subject to this right to repurchase. So, that's called a redemption, that 3 months out. A lot of counties just have the redemption date, if you don't pay by the redemption date, you're done. But, we've decided, and there have been other counties that do the same thing, that allow this new repurchase thing. We choose two weeks ahead, we were in a lawsuit before, so, it gives a second bite of the apple to repurchase. Which is in keeping with, I think, the County's philosophy that you don't want to take people's property.

DOTY: Fair enough, thank you.

SCOZZAFAVA: Another issue that, don't assume that because these properties are in a tax sale that they're not occupied, because that's another major problem. We have people purchasing properties at tax sale that are still occupied and then they end up having to put those people off that property, to put them out of that property and that's a huge problem. I said, for years, Dan, as you know, you know, once we hit that timeframe where they can no longer redeem, we should be putting these people out of that property.

MANNING: Well, I'm not in the business of doing...

SCOZZAFAVA: Well, I know that, but the problem's going to be, turn it over to Bruce or HAPEC.

MANNING: Well, we would do it, we would do it.

SCOZZAFAVA: Somebody's got to evict these people and as Mike knows, because we've been in this situation, now you've got to find temporary housing, because a lot of these people are low income.

HUGHES: I've got to be honest with you, though, that is a house that would not be, in my opinion, even if it was a tax sale house and there's a family in it, that's off, there are other organizations that can handle that. I don't want to see a land bank or us, as a housing authority...

SCOZZAFAVA: The issue that I am making is your new buyers and I've seen it happen, it sales at the tax sale, the people want to get in there, they want to renovate it and so on and especially with Covid, they were waiting, I mean you couldn't put them out.

MANNING: Covid really put a monkey wrench in all of this.

SCOZZAFAVA: I mean here, they bought the property in the tax sale and they can't do anything with it, but they can't evict them.

MANNING: Now, you can. That's why our tax sales have been delayed, because of Covid.

MONTY: Are those a lot of rentals, Tom? Or are they people that owned a home?

SCOZZAFAVA: They're not AirBnBs.

MONTY: No, no, I am just saying, because you talk about...

SCOZZAFAVA: Although we did have a property in Port Henry that sold in the last tax sale for \$50,000.00, nice old Victorian and they just turned around, the people that purchased it and that person got a divorce or whatever and they sold it for \$110,000.00.

MASCARENAS: Well, that's my point, I don't think we're really getting value at our tax sale.

SCOZZAFAVA: Yeah, we're not, absolutely.

MASCARENAS: We are on our high end properties; right? And hopefully they're making up the money on our middle to low properties, but we're not going to give the land bank a property in North Elba, it's not going to happen, the Board's not going to approve that; right? Because, that's a property that's going to give back the majority of your taxes that you've been owed.

SCOZZAFAVA: But, it doesn't fulfill the mission of the land bank then, because the whole mission here is to, so the people in these communities can afford housing, which, right now, I doubt that they can in North Elba. I don't know.

MASCARENAS: I don't want to speak for Dan Manning, but in that case, Tom, if we took the property and there was an issue, I think the County would evict. We're not going to evict 120 properties prior to a tax sale, if we have 1.

SCOZZAFAVA: It sounds like you're only talking a couple of properties.

MANNING: Yeah and that's a summary proceeding. It's just boom, boom, boom go to court and if they don't have a defense, you get a judgment, then they have to leave, if they don't leave, they get physically escorted out by the Sheriff and their stuff.

MONTY: And in our conversations with other land banks across the State, they aren't doing huge projects, you know, would you say, Ken, 3 - 5, some of the more established land banks? So, it's

not like we're going out to save Essex County, here and did it all at once. But, we want to take one step at a time.

SCOZZAFAVA: Bruce, you deal with this, I mean what community, right now, has a huge housing, other than Moriah, we know that, I mean especially for the aged population.

MISARSKI: Right

SCOZZAFAVA: That's who I receive most of my calls from are the elderly and I call you for the Lee House.

MISARSKI: It seems like every town.

SCOZZAFAVA: Every town and that's just going to continue to grow.

MASCARENAS: Right

HUGHES: Seniors want to age in place and they want to be able to do it in an affordable way and I want to see us provide that, they deserve that opportunity.

LEERKES: And they need to have access to areas that they're going to be able to get their needs met.

SCOZZAFAVA: Exactly.

LEERKES: So, grocery stores...

HUGHES: Absolutely

MASCARENAS: Pharmacies.

SCOZZAFAVA: Moriah Shock, seriously, that campus would make a fantastic assisted living facility. I mean everything's in place.

MONTY: Alright, Krissy, have you got anything? I know you deal with the aging community.

LEERKES: I am here, I think that Mike's option that he presented, I think it's a no-brainer. Again, I am going to go back mimicking what Tom just said, is, you know, older adults, they are looking at, if you're not able to age in place, they want to be able to age into like a senior housing with access, like I said to grocery stores, pharmacies, if they have transportation and a lot of our communities don't offer that, don't necessarily offer it, but have that. So, looking at Lake Placid, looking at Ti, that is definitely, you know, even Willsboro, those housing have a long waiting list, so if there's ever any possibility of senior housing, not necessarily assisted living, but senior housing, it would be filled in days and their money stays here, they spend their money in community, they're not traveling out. So, they're investing into their community, because they have to.

HUGHES: And it would probably work at a profit. I mean not a huge profit margin, but absolutely at a profit.

LEERKES: I don't know about if you can speak to that about the Lee House, but I think it's a profit across the board, where a lot of the individuals can be in the community, not hitting that next level of maybe nursing home, we can wrap services around them. I see Terry nodding, I think she would say the same for the individuals that she supports.

MISARSKI: I think, also, with the elderly, I mean every town, people that are from Lewis or whatever town, they generally, elderly folks want to say in the town that they've lived their whole lives in. It does speak to the need for good transportation, so that, you know, the person in Lewis doesn't have to move to Lake Placid or something to find housing, but if they can age in place and still, not have a grocery store in all 18 of our towns, but transportation wherever we have it.

MONTY: And public transportation isn't a wide spread aspect of Essex County, either. So, that factors into aging in place and stuff of that nature.

Anna, any thoughts?

REYNOLDS: I do, I was just wondering if towns had considered looking at a local law restricting AirBnBs in their communities? It's something that's occurred all over the Country, various cities and villages, having problems that have been adopted to cut down, not, you know get rid of it, 100%, but to cut down, because of the lack of housing stock in their municipalities.

MONTY: I don't know how popular it would be, but it would be a good thought.

SCOZZAFAVA: Well, that's, you're crossing that line that you just spoke about.

MONTY: Right

SCOZZAFAVA: I mean now you're telling people that own property what you can and can't do on it and you're not going to be allowed to rent it. I mean that's a, that's another slippery slope.

MONTY: It is, Tom, but then you have the property owners that are putting out their AirBnBs and other avenues and not complying with occupancy tax rules.

SCOZZAFAVA: Well, that we need to be enforcing it, which I believe we are.

MASCARENAS: But, if you get somebody from New Jersey, which you're talking about that's happening regularly, buying properties in our area and then simply for a rental income, that's really hurting our locals.

HUGHES: And I would think that you would have some cover if a comprehensive plan and/or a local law addressed that, because it's for the community.

SCOZZAFAVA: Absolutely

HUGHES: Because, that's what the community wants in their overall plan. So, if that's what the community wants, then the community should get what they want.

MANNING: You can do it, but, you know, Tom's point's well taken and I'm not siding with anybody, you know it alienates your property, is a big, is a coveted thing in this Country and so you have to be careful about how you do it and legally doing it has to be, you can't selectively spot zone or do things like that.

MONTY: Can I send a woman to see you who came to my office last week, because she built two camps on her property, without permits, they dug up a swamp and made a pond and several aspects that they never were permitted, I'm not mentioning any names.

MASCARENAS: And look at the problems that we're dealing with around employment; right? And it's not just Essex County; right? It's our school systems, it's our maker industry and its Mountain Lake Services, big sign in the middle of Port Henry; right? It's all these places when our greatest export is our young people and the greatest reason why is because they can't afford to live here. They can't buy homes, because they don't exist. Our housing stock is very limited. So, I think it's prudent that we figure it out. We've got to at least decide on something. Even if we clean up blight, start that process. We're going to make our neighborhoods more attractive to live in. We're going to have vacant lots that are buildable. They're going to meet the needs. Those people that want property outside our hamlets, that need to subdivide and do all those types of things for APA requirement, they don't want to live in our hamlets anyhow. But, those people that want to work in Essex County, they want to be school teachers in our communities, that's where they're going to live anyway, but right now our housing stock is aging. It's crumbling, our infrastructure is not unlike any other part of America, right now and without action, it's going to continue to do such and with our population that's aging, there's simply not those areas for those people to live in. they stay in their homes longer, right? They don't go to senior housing, because it doesn't exist, opening up those residences for young people to occupy moving forward. So, we need to figure it out and I think that this is a very good first step if we can get control of it and at least try; right? If we fail, we fail, but we need to try.

HUGHES: If we succeed, we succeed in a big way.

MASCARENAS: Right, I fail a lot.

MONTY: And if you never try, you never fail.

Carol, you've been sitting there quite quietly. I know you've got thoughts.

CALABRESE: No, it's a good discussion. It's good to listen to everybody's thoughts. I have a couple of things on the back burner. I've been working with one of the Adirondack Action Staff, but they have been having conversations with an agency that I've never heard of and she's on vacation this week, she's going to try and setup a conference call, so I can learn more about what this agency is and what it potentially could mean for assistance with our mission here and once I have an update on that, I will bring it to this committee and share it.

And the other thing that I was doing, I was actually listening to the Governor, who was giving the State of the State and as soon as she got to economic development, I had to come here. I believe a program called Restored New York, did you guys?

MASCARENAS: Very familiar with it.

CALABRESE: They're supposed to be funding it and it was in the budget and the last time they funded this was 2017 and housing, I just was, I looked at the 2017 application and housing and rentals are, they were in the last version of this program, eligible. Again, I'll go back and see what the Governor's budget is in detail, but maybe we'll have access and bring back to this initiative, but that can be pretty big, because the last time I think it was a million dollars per municipality.

MASCARENAS: It was a lot.

CALABRESE: And honestly there's 18 towns and a county, so, again, I don't have the update, because it just happened, but I think looking at the budget and what's approved in there, might be some resources that we can bring back, not just in our capacity individually, but to this particular initiative, as well.

MONTY: Thank you

MISARSKI: Yeah, the Governor just came out with a new 5-year capital plan for New York State housing, so the other thing they have is a small rental development; which is new and really interesting in that is funding for units that are, buildings that are fewer than 25 units, because, we typically have not been able to compete in the rental market. You know, most of the State's money comes out in tax credit projects; which developers, larger developers are usually in charge of and usually wouldn't go out and do anything under 50 units. So, we're kind of stuck with, you know, in our small communities, we really can't compete and Lake Placid was lucky enough to get a project there, but usually, you know, Plattsburgh and communities of that size are about as small as they're wanting to operate, so that's a great addition to the State's funding piece and I want to just tag on to what Anna was saying. You know with this affordable housing crunch that we're having, I'm a little skeptical of, you know, our population hasn't really grown that much in the last couple of years. We've actually lost population and yet we have housing crunch. So, what's really going on? And you know, and everybody's running out there, we've got to build units, we need more units, but really now, what actually is going on with all these units that are out there and a lot of it is investors. You know, housing is now an investment vehicle rather than a place to just live and so we do have a lot of people that are investing in housing, not to live in that housing, but to own it, sell it, make money off of it and so there's a role for government in all of this. It's not just, you know government doesn't need to just be getting into the development, but we, you know, but there's things like buildings codes, we should be reinforcing our building codes in the County and supporting that with the funding that we have, I think in this County we're weak on that.

REYNOLDS: That's a good point. It seems like we're about to compete with potential developers, instead of maybe creating local laws or some kind of restriction before they are able to purchase everything in sight.

MISARSKI: Right, right, right.

MONTY: Become a little more regulatory.

REYNOLDS: Yeah

MISARASKI: There's things that government can do.

MONTY: Absolutely, I agree.

MORSE: I think one of the reasons, too, that the population, the low income population is having some difficulty finding places to live is because landlords are not being held accountable for the quality of their home. I just heard a horror story about this family who's living in the bottom floor of a house and the rats have eaten into the siding, so much so that they can only, and they wrapped all the electric on the outer rooms and they can only live in the center of the house and who's holding that landlord accountable?

SCOZZAFAVA: Did you report it? I hope you reported it the code enforcement.

MORSE: And they're too afraid to report it.

SCOZZAFAVA: Did you report it to code enforcement?

MORSE: No

SCOZZAFAVA: You need to do that.

MORSE: Alright, I will.

SCOZZAFAVA: Because, a lot of these situations, we're not aware of.

MORSE: But, if they get kicked out, where are they going to go?

SCOZZAFAVA: And that's the catch 22.

MASCARENAS: They show up in my lobby.

MORSE: Exactly.

MASCARENAS: That's where they show up.

SCOZZAFAVA: You absolutely need to let or at least let the town supervisor know of what town it's in and we'll take it from there.

MASCARENAS: I've got a pretty good working relationship with most code guys, now. We've worked hard to establish that in most communities, because that was a problem when I became

Commissioner and I think that's been one positive that we've experienced. I've worked with your guy a lot and you've shut down bad residences.

SCOZZAFAVA: We've closed down, in the last few, 7 or 8 houses in Moriah.

MASCARENAS: Yeah

SCOZZAFAVA: I mean condemned them and closed them down.

MASCARENAS: And I think that's part of the answer to Bruce's question. I think the housing is just becoming more substandard as time goes on; right? It's falling into disrepair and creating blight. So, it's not that the units don't exist, it's the quality of the units are so poor that you wouldn't put anyone in them.

MONTY: And I think on top of that, I would like to know if there was any way we could find out, in the last 5 to 10 years, the number of homes that were sold or purchased as second homes or AirBnBs. I think that would be very interesting, coupled with the deterioration of these homes for people to live in. Those homes are being taken off the market that residents can't get, because someone else is buying them as a second home and granted, yeah, they're coming here and spending their money and buying their second homes, but what about the people that live here? We really need to take care of them.

REYNOLDS: I think, Jim McKenna at the last Economic Development meeting said that he might have the AirBnB data for like rentals for the year.

MONTY: Right

REYNOLDS: I don't know if he sent that out, but I can ask Jim.

MONTY: Yeah, I think he was going to do it for the next meeting. I haven't seen anything come across the desk, yet and I know he got me my information, originally, where the Town of Lewis had none and I have found a dozen, so far.

REYNOLDS: Yeah

MONTY: And stuff and most of them are primarily repurchased of homes that could of went to people that live here, so.

Alright, we're moving on an hour. Alyssa, would you like to share anything?

BARTLETT: I think all the points that everybody's been raising are really good points. Going back to Bruce's last statement that we really don't know what the full need is. We don't know what the population changes are going to produce. It would be interesting to have a population capture done. The fact is, on the table, that all of our towns have no vacancy, right now, pretty much. There's very little on the market. So, things have been purchased, the question goes back to the question that you just reached and I think, is they've been purchased by whom and what are those numbers. I think if we look at previous trends, we have seen an increase in second

homeownerships, steadily, since the '80s, that's why HAPEC and organizations like Pride and other housing, community renewal organizations have started up, because basically in the North Country to try and preserve year around housing. So, I think looking at those facts on the table and going back to Mike's points that we've got to start somewhere, I think that's important. So, and then as far as trying to and going to Tom's concerns, about what houses do we pluck from the tax rolls, I think getting out ahead of it, HAPEC has a really good track record for creating assessment forms, so maybe taking a template and using that to move forward with the code officers, getting a template and taking it forward and reviewed and revised, as you move ahead, so you can be ready to figure out what are the best properties to pluck from the rolls, and being ready for that 13-day, taking it back, once you get it going.

MONTY: Thank you. Anyone else?

Well, thank you and I would request, my email address for those that don't have it, is supervisor@lewistownhall.com, if you want to give me an overview of what you think the community needs are, especially pertaining to your demographics. Krissy, like the Office of the Aging and Mental Health and HAPEC. Thank you and we'll see you in a month.

**THERE WAS NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THIS TASK FORCE IT WAS
ADJOURNED AT 12:00 PM.**

Respectively Submitted,

Dina Garvey, Deputy Clerk
Board of Supervisors