

Low and Moderate Income Housing Development Task Force

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 - 11:00 am

Ken Hughes - Chairman

Chairman Hughes called this task force to order at 11:00 am with the following in attendance: Clayton Barber, Timothy Follos, Ken Hughes, Tracie McGill, Clayton Menser, Terri Morse (11:09), Matt Stanley, Davina Thurston, Adam DeSantis, Dan Kelleher, Angie Allen, and Nicole Justice-Green. Alan Jones, Carol Calabrese, James O'Bryan, Joe Pete Wilson and Caitlyn Wargo had been previously excused. Matt Brassard was absent.

Also present: - Dina Garvey, and Renee Bruno

HUGHES: Okay, good morning, everybody, the time is 11:00ish on the 24th of February. Welcome to the Low and Moderate Income Housing Task Force. I want to get going, because many of us have been sitting here for 35 minutes, just kind of chit-chatting and I know we all have a lot of things to do.

You should have an agenda in front of you for this month and I just want to kind of go over a couple of topics on the agenda. It won't be in a specific order and as I continue to work on this, I really am beginning to feel like the activities and the initiatives that are going to come out of this Task Force are really going to be driven by the Task Force and I feel like my job as the Chairperson is to kind of steer the ship and kind of keep us in the certain lane of what we need to do. It is truly going to come from you, as participants and your knowledge of what you're doing and your networks and, in your towns, and with the organizations that you're part of. That's why, in #2 here, that I want to make sure that we're very clear about who are housing partners are. I neglected to leave out ACAP, Alan Jones, the Executive Director, reminded me in a very nice, kind way and so I appreciate his communication. ACAP is a really important partner when it comes to the housing conversation. So, again, this is the line that I have and I put it in alphabetical order, this time, I'm learning. So, if there's any other organization that you feel needs to be added to this list, please let me know and I put this on here, because truly, it takes the partners that we have in Essex County to help us do what needs to be done and we, I think want to help them in what they're doing in their own spheres.

This morning we'll talk about this, briefly, but North Country Public Radio did a really nice lead story at that 8:00 North Light Program about the Land Bank and again that partnership is successful because of what we're doing with the North Country Rural Development Collation. So, that partnership and it was Pride of Ti, that partnership allowed that whole initiative to be super successful. So, it's the partnerships that we have with people and organizations in this County and I just want to make sure that we're reminded of that on a monthly basis, so if you're aware of somebody that should be added or if you know of something that is going on really, really well, please let me know so that we can talk about it and figure out ways to support their work.

And #3, I am trying to think about what we can do to be actionable. It's good to talk, but I want to take theory and put it into practice and so actionable items are a big deal, because that means we actually have to do something and test some theories and put ourselves in maybe some uncomfortable positions and unfortunately, so more work on top of what we're already doing in our respective towns or organizations. So, that's the hard lift, it's like we can think about things and talk about great ideas, but then we've got to actually do it and so these are just some ideas that I think about and I have extrapolated from our conversations here and I am not saying that any of these will be done in the short or long term, but I am saying that there are things that we

might want to think about and we should be thinking about to support towns and/or support the county in how we want to accomplish the mission of this Task Force and again, the mission is at the bottom of this first page, to just continually remind us of what we're working towards and then on the back page, these are the ongoing efforts.

Then #4, these are the things that I hear about on the radio or read about in the newspaper or hear about from colleagues about things that are happening. It's great to celebrate the successes and hopefully has those successes move along, we can remove them from the list, because they're often running and doing their own thing. So, these are just, again, things that I hear feedback that you've provided to me. I put it on here, as kind of like a brain dump, so that we are aware of what is going on. If there is something that you see that you want to latch onto or that you want to be a part of or that you want to take initiative on, that's how we're going to get stuff done here. That's how we're actually going to effectuate change for housing in Essex County.

Our next meeting is going to be March 30, 2026, after Ways and Means and we aren't adjourned yet, I just wanted to kind of go through the whole thing. That would be an amazing meeting.

Something that did come across my plate, on Page Two, I don't know if other Supervisors received this or not, but I learned about this in New York City at the Association of Towns, Governor Hochul, was there, I unfortunately missed her speech, but there was a lot of good discussion about this Express NY initiative and if you take a look at the first bullet, it says, speed up housing and infrastructure development and so, what I will do, because it is an embedded link where it says, new portal, I will share out that link to this Task Force through Dina and if you can take an opportunity to fill out, I think it's a fairly short form, fill out what our ideas are for cutting red tape, bureaucracy, not just for housing, but for maybe other areas that are brought up in that form. I think New York State Government is looking to find out ways to eliminate the bureaucracy and red tape that sometimes hinders our abilities and town's abilities, local government ability to do the things that taxpayers and voters want done. So, I provided that in case you hadn't received it and I'll make sure that that link is shared out.

STANLEY: So, one of the things that she had mentioned in her address to the conference was, one of the things they wanted to stop was the State redoing similar like, and I am going to use SEQR as an example, but I don't think that was it. Like some municipalities do their own type of SEQR and then the State does SEQR on top of it. So, they're trying to remove that State level, if a local jurisdiction already does it. It will check the box for the State, as well.

HUGHES: That's great, that's great feedback.

So, that's our conversation in a nutshell, today, I know that Nicole, is here from the North Country Rural Development regarding the 60-unit building, Regan Development, I don't know if you want to talk about that a little bit or if there's something that anyone wants to talk about initiatives. When it comes to #3 on the agenda, it's kind of an open forum, right now and if no one wants to speak I am going to dive into something that I think we can dive into, but I am putting it out to you guys, first. Do you want to lead off on the great news?

JUSTICE-GREEN: It's an amazing deal, I mean it's massive. I mean this is what we talked about having multiple tools in our toolbox. So, this toolbox is that one in which a private developer, Regan Development, approached Ticonderoga, right around that time I started my job, about replicating a similar development that they've done in North Elba, successfully, a 60-unit with workforce housing, commercial space, potentially daycare at the bottom, some of those units,

Terri, isn't here, but a number of those units, I think at least 10 are for supportive housing, so there's ESSHI grant leverage, there's some Land Bank initiative funding leverage and about 24-18 months ago, they approached us to be their non-for-profit partners, which is a requirement for the application and we thought about it for awhile and then ultimately decided to work with them. The first application was unsuccessful and the reason it was unsuccessful was because the return on investment in years, like 10-12 they were underwater and our cost of living actually went up in the County, this past year, so the AMI changed, which fixed some of those funding issues and then we were also able through the Land Bank initiative funding to get them additional gap funding, but it was so small compared to the over \$30 million total development, but it did make a difference. So, I am very excited for it. I am also very excited that, besides helping with some State regulatory work, we are actually not putting shovels in the ground for them. They're leading this project; we're just a supportive compliance partner on the State side of this. Since the announcement, we've had dozens of calls to our office to be added to a waitlist, which doesn't even exist, yet. This development is so far out, so it just goes to show how very needed this sort of housing is and it's solidly rental housing, which is something that the Land Bank does not do and does not want to do and so I think it's a great example of partnership. I know that we've had the conversation earlier on in this Task Force about other ways to bring developers like this in other towns around Essex County. The big reason why this worked in Ticonderoga, which it almost did not, compared to Lake Placid, is we have the hospital, which is a State criteria, it's walking distance to Walmart, so they can get food and grocery and pharmacy. There is some public transportation, and our wastewater and public water infrastructure could support it, with that being said, they had to leverage additional funding in this development to increase the capacity of Ticonderoga's water system, because it's already kind of at max, which is also one reason why the first application was not successful. So, finding a developer who was willing to do that and go through the extra hoops where we are is difficult, so I am very proud of Regan for sticking it out, but that also does mean that we want to continue to send them spaces in Jay or someplace else where this may potentially work, those are all going to be some logical things to work out and to market appropriately.

HUGHES: It's super amazing, for new Supervisors and maybe anybody else in the room, you mentioned ESSHI, for Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative, so I just want to make sure that that acronym is understood. Thank you for that update, continued success as you begin to move in through all of it and please, certainly keep us in the loop and if you want to know more about the project, there is not one new outlet that has not covered it. So, there has been a lot of really positive press about it, so definitely check in on that and I am sure we'll be hearing a lot more about it in the months and years to come. So, that's really wonderful.

MORSE: And Mr. Hughes

HUGHES: Yes, welcome, Terri.

MORSE: I did reach out to Valerie Answorth, at MHA, who is the recipient of the ESSHI Grant to attend this meeting, maybe not every month.

HUGHES: Yeah, if course

MORSE: And she is going to come in March.

HUGHES: Wonderful, we would love to have her.

JUSTICE-GREEN: How many units was it?

MORSE: I think it was 12.

HUGHES: MHA is Mental Health Association.

MORSE: So, what the ESSHI funding will support is wrap around service for mental health and other kinds of disabilities. So, there will be a person, a beefed up care management, high intense care management and also part of that funding will include some rental assistance support for those 12 individuals, for 5-years, at least 5-years.

HUGHES: Great, thank you.

If you have also been listening to the news, you probably heard about Fox Hill, the APA just did an approval of this housing development, new homestead, up in North Elba. They're taking the same model that they previously had and they're going to replicate it, but with a different twist in terms of how the homes are set up and established in the neighborhood that they're working at, so there is some press on that and they're kind of operating independently. I don't think they contacted us at all, but that is what's going on up in North Elba, which is another place where workforce housing is really needed. So, nice to see something in the southeastern part of the County and nice to see something happening in North Elba, as well.

Does anybody see anything on here that they want to talk about, either on the first or second page?

STANLEY: So, you have on, as your C bullet point, Pro Housing Communities, it was brought up a lot during the Association of Towns meetings that Pro-Housing Communities are going to become a requirement to apply for some housing grants. So, for communities that haven't done the pro-housing community, yet should really get onboard, because it's not just going to a thing to add points, it's going to be the thing that allows you to get some housing grants or not housing grants.

HUGHES: So, I'll admit publicly and on the record, that the Town of Essex is not a Pro-Housing Community and I've had a really, and I know many of my colleagues are, and towns are Pro-Housing Communities, and it seems kind of weird that the Chairman of the Housing Task Force is not a Pro-Housing Community and I have actually spoken to a couple of people about this and to use the phrase, for me, at least for me in Essex, is the juice worth the squeeze? I don't know, I've been troubled to be convinced that it would benefit the Town of Essex, because I don't know what type of housing grants I would be going for in the Town of Essex, as the Town doesn't own any properties that could potentially become eligible for housing grants and I am waiting for someone to convince me otherwise and maybe I just need to know some more information about this.

THURSTON: I do believe, in order to apply for certain water or other infrastructure, you also have to be a Pro-Housing Community, regardless of that. So, I highly recommend, if there are any Supervisors that are not a Pro-Housing Community, get on it, immediately, because it's not just housing grants that are requiring it now, it's other infrastructure, including water, sewer, roads, culverts, stormwater, you know, they really want us to take this initiative and move forward with it, so I highly recommend it.

HUGHES: Understand, that helps move the needle, thank you.

JUSTICE-GREEN: As well as, all of New York Main Street, DRI, New York Forward, most economic development grants, require it and we actually had to hire two interns to help with getting Lewis, Ticonderoga and Jay, Pro-Housing Community certified, because of the litigiousness of taking written permitting data, like none of this was digital, on our part and making it digital and getting it to the State and so it is a heavy lift for local towns. I know that since the Lake George/Lake Champlain Regional Planning Board is offering technical assistance, which is highly recommend you take them up on, because I am not going to do anymore, but I had to do that, because I had multiple housing grants and economic grants that would have been ineligible for, if we didn't get that done in a timely manner. So, we have about like 7 months until most of these grants are due, it's a 7 month onramp for those communities who might be considering making those applications to get to it.

HUGHES: What is, does anybody in the room know, once you do become a Pro-Housing Community, what are you required to do annually in order to keep that?

THURSTON: So, I did the heavy lift, personally, for St. Armand and did all the paperwork to become a Pro-Housing certified community and then on top of it, annually, you basically just have to update. They're really interested in looking, it's code enforcement information, it's basically any new single family dwellings, whether they or not they're in the water/sewer district or outside, you just, it's actually not that bad for the recertification process. It's actually not that bad, as long as you have quick access to all of your code documents. I am kind of like the secretary for my Code Enforcement Officer, I think Matt, knows that, we share a Code Officer and in my town, apparently I am a controlling person and I have to know what is going on with our codes, it has bitten me before, so I will not let go of that. So, I am intimately aware of exactly what's going on with our code officer, so I think that's why it was okay for me to do, because I know everything that we do.

HUGHES: Sure

THURSTON: So, if you're not a controlling person for your code officer, you might need a little assistance there, for me it was okay.

HUGHES: I just struggle, because I don't want to set myself up for something I can't fulfill.

THURSTON: I bet you can do it.

HUGHES: I am sure I probably could but is it the right thing for my town and I know there are other towns in the County who are not, but it's a small number. The pressure is growing on me.

BARBER: It is a Pro-Housing Community and my Planning Board Chair, and my Code Officer got together and go through the zoning laws and the Town passed a resolution to become a Pro-Housing Community.

JUSTICE-GREEN: Yeah, if you don't meet the metric of showing growth, you just pass a simple resolution. I will say for a State program, if everything is already digitized, it is not difficult and neither is the recertification. What the State is really looking at is to actually get data, totally across the State, real data, as to what our housing growth is and is not and then have the information to look at, why is the Park struggle, and the Catskill Park isn't and have the requisite zoning data attached the permitting data. It is unfortunate that we have to do that to get grant funding, but otherwise communities would not do it, it would not incentivize them to do it. So, it is helping the State develop on the ground, real projects, efficiency grants and other things that I have seen come out of her office, which Express New York is directly related to that Pro-Housing Community Initiative.

HUGHES: And I do like that idea, because if it is feeding a database for either the Adirondacks, Essex County or the larger North Country Region to help identify housing trends, that is a positive thing.

FOLLOS: In Wilmington, I guess, probably two years ago, we passed a resolution, the Town Board, so we thought we were a Pro-Housing Community, but as Nicole said, the resolution is kind of a backup plan. So, Adan, held our hand through the process of dealing with the Code Enforcement Officer of getting the paperwork to Adam, getting the necessary paperwork and I went to the Code Enforcement Officer's office and he said, I hate you.

HUGHES: Great start.

THURSTON: You're doing your job.

FOLLOS: But I think it took him less than a week to get it.

DESANTIS: We were able to turn it around relatively quickly and we completed the submission for the Town of Wilmington and the Town of Keene, last week. So, they should, barring any issues, certification within the next 90-days.

HUGHES: Awesome, thank you for that. Adan, did you have something else?

DESANTIS: Yeah, I was going to add that as an update. Both Wilmington and Keene have now submitted.

HUGHES: Awesome

FOLLOS: And thank you for helping us with that.

HUGHES: And Adam, while we got you, can you talk a little bit about what's happening on March 5th, down at the Lodge at Schroon Lake?

DESANTIS: Sure, the Adirondack Community Foundation is hosting a media focused event that was opened to their fund donors, local officials and other interested parties to make an announcement that I won't speak prematurely about, today, but they've assembled a panel of stakeholders who are working in and around housing issues throughout the Adirondacks to talk about, what work and process that has been made over the past several years and then to make an exciting announcement that should help fuel additional development throughout Essex County and other regions in the Adirondacks, as well.

HUGHES: That's really, really great. I think our own Chairman McNally, will be...

DESANTIS: He will be introducing the guests and that's going to take maybe 15-20 minutes to kind of lay the landscape, as an update.

HUGHES: Perfect, perfect. Well, I signed up for it, if you're able to attend, hopefully, you can sign up. It is at the Lodges at Schroon Lake on March 5th, 10:00-12:00. So, looking forward to being there and hopefully some of you can attend that event, should be nice.

I want to go back on the 1st page, because something that I am personally impassionate about and my colleagues to the left here, your right, is also on record of being passionate about, at least on North Country Public Radio, this morning is the conversation about blighted properties and I just want to have a short conversation around this, because there was a brief conversation at one of our committee meetings in February about blighted property and laws regarding blighted properties and this is probably more for my Supervisor colleagues, here. I'm wondering, I don't know, 18 towns, I don't know which 18 towns have blighted property laws on the books. I personally feel that blighted properties are a great opportunity to make solid improvements to our communities, our neighborhoods, to assessment values, to all of those things that we're looking to do to improve quality of life in our towns and in the County. I think I have spoken about how in Essex, locally, I have written letters to all of the owners of those blighted properties, informing them of my desire, in a very nice and non-governmental way to support any opportunities that might exist for them to get out of that blighted property, to help, potentially through grant funding, potentially through the Land Bank, potentially through town ownership to just help them, especially if it was an heir's property, where the home was owned by great-grandmother, 40-50 years ago and she passed away and nobody cared about for that last 50 years. I received either no communication, a hell no communication or not for sale communication, so I tried. My question is, do we want to take a look at supporting towns who don't have a blighted property law and maybe working with our County Attorney's office to develop language that might support the towns to create a template of a law that they could consider locally, at their own town?

STANLEY: Are we talking about an unsafe structure law or blighted property?

HUGHES: So, that's a great question and I was corrected a couple of weeks ago, that an unsafe structure law is different than a blighted property law.

JUSTICE-GREEN: And also, nuisance properties, another name for the laws that you're describing.

HUGHES: Blighted or nuisance property, is that what you're saying?

JUSTICE-GREEN: Yeah, and nuisance property can also be a catchment phrase for unsafe structures and blight.

HUGHES: Okay, I was told they were different entities. I am not an attorney, so I know Essex, has an unsafe structure law, but I don't think we have a blighted property law and I am just wondering if we're looking to address blight in our towns, how can we use local government levers to support the reduction, elimination or redevelopment of blighted properties through code enforcement or local zoning or things like that? Because these properties, they're going to languish there.

JUSTICE-GREEN: Yes

HUGHES: They're going to languish there, and I feel like if they're going to languish there and my issue is, I've got 10 properties, if you come into my office, you'll see 10 pictures of 10 blighted properties, the taxes are paid on all those properties. So, I really can't touch them, but I would love to use local code enforcement, because some of those properties have good bones, some of those buildings still have good bones, they're just blighted and I feel like something needs to be done about that, but I don't want to go it alone, I want to bring it up to the Task Force to see, is this a low hanging fruit that we might be able to take advantage of?

BARBER: I believe I was the one that brought it up at the last, and asking other towns.

HUGHES: I think you did.

BARBER: And I misunderstood, because I thought it was the County, the County had to pass the law first and then the town would piggyback off that procedure. I can tell you that the Town of Chesterfield and I am talking mostly burnt houses and so, by all means, I'm confused, you know, unsafe structure, but yet, blighted property. I have been talking about this for a year and half at my Town Board Meetings, it's brought up every month, especially when you do a revalue of assessed properties. People come in and say, you're raising my taxes and I'm stuck to a burnt, next to a burnt house.

HUGHES: Yup

BARBER: How can you do this? I've been living there for the last 10 years, and you haven't done nothing to the people that own this property.

HUGHES: Yup

BARBER: So, by all means and I talked about, because I was told by Mr. Manning, if it's a residential, you can charge them \$1-\$2,500 and he's just speaking of what he thinks you can do

and I talked about it at my meetings and just talking about it, I've had two people that have actually cleaned up their property, because they we're afraid of adding that to their taxes every year. So, I think it's a big, I'm glad you brought it up, because I think it's something that needs to be addressed here, in Essex County and soon.

HUGHES: Well, I brought it up, because you brought it up.

BARBER: Well, I will be the first one to adopt that law.

HUGHES: Mutual admiration society, right there.

TANSEY: I am not smart enough to go through the details and differences between blighted properties, unsafe structure and nuisance. Unsafe properties or unsafe buildings certainly are code related, whether you don't have the right wood, or you got steel, exposed floors or whatever. Blighted properties, nuisance properties affect the neighbors and health and hazardous, but I can put a diagram or some kind of a thing together to compare those three, bring in some fines, some elements at the next meeting.

HUGHES: I would like to take a two tier approach to this, at least two, if someone can think of another tier, then let's do it. If you can do that, that would be great to help educate the Task Force from the legal perspective on what each one of those areas and how they are or are not related. I am going to reach out to my colleagues and find out who has a blighted property and/or unsafe structure law or nuisance property law on the books, so that we can identify who has what and who doesn't have what, so we can figure out potentially, if we move forward on this, how we can help those towns to adopt something that would help them locally, because clearly, we can't do it at the County level, but we can use this Task Force to support the local effort, like you're talking about to help with the general housing crisis that we have in the County.

FOLLOS: This sounds like eminent domain, is this a species of eminent domain or is this something different?

HUGHES: I'm not thinking eminent domain on this, there could potentially be issues of eminent domain, but that's not mine, eminent domain from all the things that I've ever experienced, especially when I went to St. Louis for that National Housing Event, eminent domain is the last, the absolute last way to do it and so you've got to jump through a bunch of hoops and then go through them again, because you actually pull the trigger on eminent domain. So, that is not what I am looking to do here, for the record. I want to help people through communication and through conversation and through the levers that we have to figure out what we can do with those blighted properties.

FOLLOS: Thank you

WOOD: I know that all our towns are very different, but they're similar and they're small. I would suggest that you also have conversations with your local justice about how the procedures would go and make sure that everyone is on the same level of agreement, but you don't just get a scolding and be told whatever. I think that's really important.

HUGHES: Thank you

THURSTON: So, Clayton, St. Armand just recently went through this, and I have had many conversations about this. We have an unsafe structure local law. We have a building that was damaged by fire. It was owned by a gentleman that died almost 10 years ago. The heirs have just been living there; they had been paying the taxes. It was burned, that had to move out. No one agreed to do anything. The town ended up using our unsafe structure to have that property demolished. It did go on the tax bill, sorry, Mike. I got permission to do it before.

MASCARENAS: I appreciate you bringing that up.

THURSTON: Yup, so my plan is, when we get paid back for that, putting it on the tax bill, I plan on putting the money aside and it's going to take 3 years before it will be foreclosed upon, but we are using that mechanism to get that unsafe structure. Now, it's a vacant lot and it looks a lot better and we aren't worried about people breaking in and getting hurt, but certainly if you have an unsafe structure and a burned out building, game over. You've got exactly what you need to make that go away.

BARBER: Okay, so did they eventually donate the property?

THURSTON: No, the heirs won't agree to anything, so they're going to stop paying the taxes and we put the entire demolition onto the tax bill.

BARBER: Okay and so, in my circumstances, these people are paying the taxes.

THURSTON: That's fine, but if they don't fix that unsafe structure, you can make them demolish it and if they will not demolish it, you can demolish it.

MASCARENAS: Correct

HUGHES: And bill them, that is correct, 100% correct.

MASCARENAS: Yeah, just for some clarity. The way that all works, sometimes blighted properties can be unsafe structure properties, sometimes the two intermingle, just so everybody understands, not always, not never. One thing that I will tell you, 30-year old Mike was really passionate when it came to blighted properties, 50-year old Mike has worked on blighted property for 20-years and hasn't gotten real far and there's a lot of barriers to that and Davina, just explained a few. Meg was getting to a point that is really relevant. The County can absolutely help you write language. The County can absolutely work with you on what you want to get accomplished, accomplished. What I am not interested in doing is telling 18 towns on how they need to respond to issues. I believe that's a little out of my lane and I would never do that. I think it is up to all of you to drive what the future of your communities look like and giving you the tools to do that and adopt or not adopt and I know we hear Mr. Hughes be apprehensive about being Pro-Housing, well, the County is not going to tell him, you have to become Pro-Housing, that's a decision for the Town of Essex, so I think we can get there. The way it works is just as Davina

explained. If you have an unsafe structure, the Town through code enforcement has the ability to remove that. We also have a Board of Health that some of on your Town Boards act as your Board of Health, some have appointed Board of Health. I am not sure which individual town has, but you have that capacity. If you were to remove that structure, it then gets placed on the warrant. The County then makes that warrant whole, if the taxes aren't paid. So, if you go in and you spend \$10,000.00 to remove a property under someone else that owns it, the County is going to make that warrant whole or the taxpayer is going to pay it. If the taxpayer pays it, that's an absolute win-win, that's what you prefer to happen, not likely what's going to happen. What's going to happen is the latter, the latter is it's going to be placed on the warrant, eventually you get to foreclosure, a little more quickly and those properties, because there's a higher amount owed and blighted property laws act mostly in the same way, they offer fines and those types of things that people can impose locally than then fall back to the warrant, which is always paid by the County, just so everybody understands and hopefully you get that back at auction or you don't.

HUGHES: I just want to support what you just said. I see us as an advisory, if it involves the towns, we are advisory only to the towns, I want to be clear from my voice to all of you about that.

BARBER: So, one last question on this, did the town actually hire somebody to actually remove?

THURSTON: Yeah, we went to bid, we had to have K&S go in and do asbestos and lead, it was one of the oldest homes in Bloomingdale. So, we had to, it was a lot of money, I believe, Mike, it was \$79,000.00 at the end of the day.

MASCARENAS: Yeah

THURSTON: Because we had to have asbestos, we had to have lead, it had a barn, it had RV camper, it had all this stuff that was unsafe. So, basically there were three heirs to the property, nobody wanted to take any accountability for it. It had stayed in the dead person's, the grandfather's name. So, again, the County made the Town whole, I promise, I am going to set that money aside, but I am hoping, eventually, either someone will buy it and a new home will be built there or the Land Bank will get it and put up some form of housing, eventually, it's going to take years, but at least the unsafe structure is gone, the burned out, scary building is gone.

BARBER: One last comment, I see the difference between a blight property and burnt out house, I would still consider them in the same category.

THRUSTON: They may well be.

STANLEY: A burned out house is definitely going to be an unsafe structure. You can definitely take care of that with your unsafe building law. A blighted structure could be something that's not lived in, it's not structurally unsafe, it just looks bad.

JUSTICE-GREEN: The structural integrity is what's that clear delineating point there, is if you can have the certificate of occupancy fully revoked. A property can be blighted and people can still be living in it. People don't live and should not be living in unsafe structures or it becomes a legal

issue for your town and your code enforcement office, because ultimately you can be held liable if somebody gets injured on that property.

I know somebody else is in front of me, but one thing that I brought up to this committee, about 3-4 months ago was a receivership law. A receivership law is being very effectively used across the county with land banks in which properties like Davina just described, the land bank is legally appointed by your local court to be receiver of the property and instead of adding the money for the demolition onto the county's levy, the land bank comes in, performs a demolition, and places a lien on the property and this is something that has to happen town by town, but what happens with this either the property owner pays the lien or then we with the local court foreclose on the property and we have already done the work and the county and the town have had to pay for it. That gives us site control. The reason why we, as the land bank, cannot go in and see a blighted property and demolish it, is because the State will not allow me to use my demolition funds for something that I don't have site control over and then that owner could then be like, oh, you fixed the problem for me, I'm going to put it on the market and make a bunch of money. So, that is something with the Chairman's permission, I would like to also email out to the committee and the Board. It is something that I have been trying to work with the Town of Ticonderoga on, because they did actual use their nuisance property law really effectively for, lack of a better term, a drug den, in our town recently and got it boarded up, it's CO revoked, but, the home has now sat there for 12-months and there's a mortgage and they've been demanding the town, the bank that holds the mortgage to actually do the improvements on the property and they haven't and so if we do get receivership, we would go in, do the rehab, get it fully done and then it would be behooving to that bank to basically pay for the work that they should have done to begin with.

HUGHES: I support that, thank you.

STANLEY: So, I wanted to actually, at the beginning of all this is to save us from going down a rabbit hole, which we went down and recommend that Mr. Tansey come back next month with good legal advice for towns to be able to do. I like the receivership, my fear is a lot of towns are going to do and no offensive to St. Armand, but we have 10-20 properties across the county that we go and demolish and \$75,000.00 is pretty much the going rate. The Land Bank did one in our town for \$70,000.00. I know another property, which was small, it wasn't even a house, was \$30,000.00. You're starting to look at these properties at the County and I will say this for Mike, you're going to leave the County holding a lot of money for a long time that could quickly, I'm not going to say bankrupt the County, but we can have the County hold a lot of money for the towns, when we got to look at other options to go through. Whether it's the receivership, I rather a lien be placed on something that the County's not holding the checkbook for. So, I would suggest that Mr. Tansey come back next month with a lot more legal advice for the county and towns to go through and be able to do this through the court system a lot quicker and better than putting the burden on the County.

HUGHES: And that will be the counter, Mr. Stanley, between our accelerator in this conversation, the brake is going to be how much money is the County going to, you know, we want to make sure we aren't bankrupting anybody in this process.

WOOD: I agree with what you say, I also like the idea of us getting our legal ducks in a row. In Schroon Lake, we had an issue for well over 15 years in a very open area approaching the

downtown and the problem was the people could pay the taxes, they weren't local, they owned distressed properties in Glens Falls and elsewhere and we were also nice and we were always told, oh, we'll take care of it and different Boards and different codes people just let it ride, until we finally didn't and by the time we had the asbestos people coming to take out the asbestos and we sent them all the costs that were going to go on the taxes, which they paid, they just went and did it themselves and if we had probably done that 10 years earlier, the mess would have been cleaned up, but we went through people dying and inheritance, the whole nine yards.

HUGHES: Yup

WOOD: If we had a real definite set of steps to take and we've started and we followed through, I believe we wouldn't have had that heartache so long, right as you approach our downtown.

ALLEN: So, just a clarification question, this is not my area of expertise. Nicole, what you're proposing with whatever words you just used.

HUGHES: Receivership

ALLEN: Versus going on the town way, isn't it still true that with the tax auction, anywhere money that is made off the sale goes to the original buyer, correct?

THURSTON: The owner, the original owner.

ALLEN: Yeah, so the person can actually make money after not paying their taxes.

JUSTICE-GREEN: Not if a land bank...

ALLEN: Correct, I just want to make sure.

JUSTICE-GREEN: The amount of money that it costs to remediate, abate or demolish the property prior to foreclosure is not considered in the calculation of proceeds. It is actually taken off the value of the home, which is something that we have been working with Bill and Dan, on for a few years, is we were trying to work out bringing properties into the Land Bank of how to get, for these vacant lots that take on or we demolish, the fact that we're going to pay \$70,000-\$80,000 to demolish it off of the proceeds, because the owner, it's not worth that. They shouldn't be getting any proceeds if we're having to do that work. So, if we do it ahead of foreclosure through receivership, we fix the issue and that's what I learned at the National Land Bank conference, because I asked my other colleagues. How are you all dealing with this and receivership with the answer for specifically blighted properties. Properties that are blighted but are gut rehab, not demolitions, is a little bit trickier, which we have been slowly working out with the County, and I am going to talk to Mike after this, because I need to follow up with him on a few things about that.

ALLEN: So, just so I'm clear, because I am sure that there are other people in the room that may not be clear. Going through your receivership, the original owner that did not pay the taxes, could not make money?

JUSTICE-GREEN: Yes

ALLEN: That to me is a pretty important detail.

JUSTICE-GREEN: But the judges have to work with us.

ALLEN: Correct

THURSTON: I just want to say that Matt is absolutely correct. I was sickened to have to do this, Mike will tell you. I talked to him several times, but there was literally people still going in the house, so I really didn't have a choice and if you look at the Board Meeting minutes, there were tons of people that were coming every single Board Meeting and saying, when are you going to demolish this house? I saw so and so, in there this morning. So, it was a very dangerous situation, and I needed to rectify it quickly and I was crystal clear. So, anything that we can do to not do that I am all for and I welcome the receivership idea, and I hope we can make that work for us.

STANLEY: And I just want to say, I didn't want to throw you under the bus, because there are extreme circumstances where we do have to go that route.

THURSTON: Yeah, absolutely. I didn't want to, but I didn't have a choice.

STANLEY: I totally understand.

HUGHES: Awesome discussion, is there anybody else that would like to contribute anything before we adjourn.

FOLLOS: Just backtracking, Pro-Housing Community designation; sounds nice, makes people feel good, but doesn't actually require the town to do anything does it? Maybe I am not understanding something?

HUGHES: It does, that's why I am hesitating, because it does.

FOLLOS: What am I missing then? What does it require the town to do?

THURSTON: Well, each year, you basically have to update your certification as a Pro-Housing Community. So, basically, they just want to have data, so your data from your code enforcement officer, any new building applications, any new certificates of occupancy, that's the data that you input into the form. It's Excel spreadsheet, it's not hugely cumbersome. It takes a few hours after you gather all your data to recertify, but that's pretty much it. They just want to see that you're showing growth and single family and apartment buildings and anything that is showing growth moving forward is what you're submitting that data for.

WOOD: And that includes the \$10 million second homes that looks like you're growing for your local people.

THURSTON: It doesn't matter, any single family. They don't ask for the value of the home.

WOOD: That's what I am saying, it looks like you're doing stuff, when you're not for the locals.

THURSTON: Well hopefully, we are. So, that's the point.

FOLLOS: Even if you, let's say you don't meet that benchmark for the growth of housing in town and then the town board just passes a resolution, declaring the town a pro-housing, it seems very airy.

THURSTON: It is pretty airy, Tim.

HUGHES: Hence, my is the juice is worth the squeeze from my Town.

JUSTICE-GREEN: And maybe it isn't for Essex, as much as I love getting ice cream in your town, a few times a summer. I have only done one project in Essex in 4 ½ years, that's not the case for Wilmington and so if Wilmington would like the Land Bank or NRDC or even my colleagues at Adirondack Roots or anyone to do meaningful large scale housing work in your community, you do need to become Pro-Housing Community certified or I can't use my funding there and that's going to be for any colleague that is going to try to use any funding from HCR, Department of State and DASNY and so it's a worthwhile endeavor and if Adam just helped you do it, then you should be set, except for your review and the renewal process is hopefully very easy, that your code enforcement officer can just literally set up a Zoom meeting with Karis Rasmuson. Karis is who manages for Housing Community registration, and she'll walk you through it. She was really great with our interns and our code enforcement officers when we led that process for Lewis, Ticonderoga and Jay.

THURSTON: And Adam is an expert; I am sure he'll help.

FOLLOS: No, we're doing it. I have no objection. We're supposed to do and we will be helpful and we will do it. It just seems like to something that makes people feel good, it sounds nice, but it doesn't require the Towns to do anything.

WOOD: Welcome to our world.

THURSTON: It's data, I mean it's a data driven program. That's what they're looking for.

JUSTICE-GREEN: The State is a rock and we are a river that flows it and you have to learn to jump through the silly hoops to get the money to help our communities and as Mike told me, 4 ½ years ago, sometimes if it doesn't make sense don't think about it too hard, just do it, because that's just what you have to do. You know with some of these forms that you have to do 3-4 times, but before we end, Ken, one of the things that you have on our list is code enforcement which is directly related to what we just spoke about with receivership and blighted property and just cohesive code enforcement. I know we brought it up with last year and the Housing Task Force. I still would like to continue the discussion, maybe we can discuss this next time, about the feasibility of having more uniformed code enforcement countywide or shared services and I say

this as your partner at a high level in policy, as well as the person on the ground, dealing with your individual code enforcement officers across 18 towns, including those who are doing multiple towns at once. There is a really important project that we're doing in the Town of Moriah, right now and there's been a number of weather delays and we have a lot of pressure from the Department of Health and the State to get this family moved into this home. The code enforcement officer in that town is currently only available one day a week and due to weather and other issues, trying to schedule this walk through to get a certificate of occupancy, which at the end of the day, because my colleague, Mike, is cc'd on all these emails, he knows, you know, I take the heat for this not happening, it doesn't matter all these other issues, but this is one example where is family, it is taking an additional 3 ½ weeks to get this family into their home. Weather delays, contractor delays, but then we are ready, no code enforcement, another issue with the sharing up in the Town of Newcomb, poor Colin is everywhere. He is one of the code enforcement officers that I enjoy quite a bit, but trying to schedule projects, Regan Developers, increase our housing supply and deal with blighted properties when your code enforcement officer is on your town once a week and doing double duty across the board, it is not a smart business model and it is very frustrating, professionally and personally for myself and my staff, because we are chasing code enforcement officers in Essex County. I do not do that in Washington County. They have plenty of issues there, you know, because I serve three counties, but they have countywide code enforcement. I also get calls and requests for you, the Supervisors to come and do work in your towns and to spend time to do technical assistance and a lot of that partnership, even more so than that partnership with the Supervisor, the person I work with on a regular basis is your code enforcement officer or your planning and zoning board and if they're not there and able to help, those projects just do not move forward and there's nothing that I can do, it is out of my hands and I know, I can't speak for all of my colleagues here, but I know that Adirondack Roots experiences the same thing and anyone who does direct client work like we do experiences this. So, I would really implore upon you, as my colleagues, on a policy and an actual project delivery level to really think about this, this year. I would really love to something to be done.

HUGHES: So, we're going to talk this conversation until March, because we're coming up on the hour, but I will say, that I had a conversation with Colin, the code enforcement office for 6 of the 18 towns in Essex County and I told him I was having these thoughts about this and he pulled back the layer and shared with me about 8-9 different feasibility challenges that I never thought about in respect to this. It wasn't a no, but it was a have you thought about this, have you thought about this, have you thought about this and I was like, oh man, it is not just as simple as shifting the burden to the County, because when you bring it to the County, you're upping your game. So, I am going to be sitting with him, hopefully over the next month and jotting down and leaving what those feasibility challenges are, so I can pass that on to you in a turnkey way. So, that we can have an honest conversation about this and identify those challenges that I can promise you are not being all thought of that Colin is thinking about, because he's in it every day for 6 different towns. So, if we can table that if that's okay and I can bring something back to you for March. I do want to finish up, we will start 1, 2.

DESANTIS: For the next meeting, if we could add a bullet, either #3 or #4, I would like to provide an update on how we're looking to support communities that are interested in pursuing APA map amendments and also addition GIS work, primarily around water and wastewater infrastructure

and getting those layers into the public database and how that would support residential development and commercial development.

HUGHES: I'll add that, absolutely, thank you and Angie.

ALLEN: I just want to go under Nicole's thought, because we are of the same brain. So, in terms of the code enforcement, on a DSS child welfare perspective, from individuals that work with the homeless and situations, we often need the assistance of codes in various towns; right. Because my caseworkers need to assist safety of a child and we're not trained in the codes. So, we often call the town supervisor and work with the code enforcement officer, sometimes they're great, sometimes they are not very helpful. I have been told that my code enforcement doesn't go insider trailers. So, I do think and I can understand, because every town, everything is different and I get it, but I don't work for a town, I work for a county, right. And so, when we talk about code, I would just like some clarifications or some consistency of expectations around the code officer so I can educate my staff on what to expect, what not to expect, because it is so easy to expect, to assume. This is my motto, without mutual understanding, it's hard to have mutual respect. So, it is very easy for my staff to say, oh, they're not doing their job, when maybe they're hitting a ceiling that I don't know about. So, I would just like to have a part of that be a part of the conversation in terms of safety checks, welfare and how DSS can better partner with either the supervisor or the code enforcement officer, so when we need their assist to assess safety, not child wellbeing, safety, how we can improve those relationships.

STANLEY: I was going to save this for next month, but I can't. When we all have, as Supervisors, have a code enforcement officer, we love our code enforcement officer. When we don't have one, we're also looking to the County to say, help us with a code officer. So, if we all, during the good times, tackle all the issues, that is would be to make a countywide system, when and if we lose our loved code enforcement officer, we have somebody that we can have as a code enforcement officer. So, I think it's a great conversation to have next month.

HUGHES: And we are having it and the final word from Mr. Michael Mascarenas.

MASCARENAS: So, all I want to say is if we can put on a future agenda that we reviewed the studies that we've had. Admittedly, I have lost track, in my mind, all the different studies. ROOST had provided one, Anna had provided another one, I believe Beth Gillis, has something out there on all of our studies. We have some new members on this committee, learning the demographics and some of the challenges, I think, would be a worthwhile approach, at a meeting. Considering a future study, whether we go after Smart Growth Funding or something like that would really target some of the specific things that you spoke about a little bit earlier. What are some of the boundaries? What type of housing is pertinent to our individual communities? One thing that we've talked an awful lot about, but haven't really gotten town on paper, yet. Is well there's not a one sized fits all approach to Essex County, we have 18 towns that have very different needs. Well, when you spoke to and I know this, I've done a lot of water/sewer throughout my previous life, but capacity, if you did have a developer come in, how do you get site preparation, some of those things ready ahead of time to prepare you for those long-term housing, what are missing in our communities and that type of study will put us in a strong position to obtain funding, for not only housing, but for your water/sewer projects and those types of things down the road. So, I am not

against paying for some of that and recommending that in future budgets and/or through Smart Growth applications, but I want to see what we got and kind of get something that ties it all together, because right now we've got several different documents that all had different missions geared toward something different. I think, we've got a 60-unit in Ticonderoga, but what unit works in Willsboro? Maybe it's not a unit, maybe they need X amount of single family dwellings, I don't know. But if we have a roadmap to look at and then base our work on that on an annual basis, not just shelf a plan, but have a working document that we can check these items off the list as we go and show meaningful results. I think that would help us an awful lot.

HUGHES: Terrific conversation, everybody. Thank you so very much for sticking around and we'll see you on March 30th at 11:00.

**THERE WAS NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THIS TASK FORCE WAS
ADJOURNED AT 12:02 PM.**

Respectively Submitted,

Dina Garvey, Deputy Clerk
Board of Supervisors