Low and Moderate Income Housing Development Task Force
Monday, April 27, 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 (11:10), James O'Bryan, Tim Pierce, Davina Thurston, and Carol Calabrese. Angie Allen, Matt Brassard, Matt Stanley, Joe Pete Wilson, Adam DeSantis, Dan Kelleher, and Nicole Justice-Green were excused. Alan Jones and Caitlyn Wargo were absent.

Also present: - Dina Garvey, and Renee Bruno

HUGHES: Okay, good morning, everybody. We'll get the Housing Task Force underway. Thank you very much for being here. I apologize that we had a double booking last month and so we weren't able to attend that event. So, I just moved everything from the March meeting to this morning.
There's a couple of follow-up items. I kind of reorganized the agenda a little bit. There's a couple of follow up items that we were going to take a look at today from Mr. Tansey and myself and then agenda item #3 is going to start taking a look at, we're not to talk about every single one of those, but start talking a look at how, we as a committee, what to support the process moving forward and I think something that Mike said in the last meeting is really beneficial to what we're looking at here, is we have 18 different towns, 18 different cultures and ideas and desires and so for example for the County to pass a moratorium that affects all 18 towns may not be in the best interest of every single town. We have different needs and wants in each town and so I kind of take that same perspective here, as this Task Force should be supporting the individual needs of the Towns and that we're not looking to pass any type of major County legislation that's going to force a Town to do something. I'm not interested in seeing us doing that, but if there's a Town that does have something and we can use that intelligence to support a Town that doesn't have something but wants that something that this Task Force can maybe support that process.
So, I just wanted to, so we'll go back to 2a, the March 5 Workforce Housing Forum from the ADK Community Foundation. There were a couple of presenters in the room, I don't think any of them were here. I was hoping Nicole Justice-Green was a presenter, so was I think Dan Kelleher and ROOST, they were presenters, but they're not here today. I think they're down in Albany. So, my quick take away, I think some of you were in the room. My quick take away from that was that it was wonderful that they received the money from New York State. It was more about middle income housing; this is the Low and Moderate Income Housing Task Force. So, it's awesome that middle income opportunities are existing and there's funding there for those opportunities, however it is a little outside of our lane in terms of what our mission is and what we're looking to do, but it was great to see that there is some action and some energy and resources that are being put into that revolving loan fund to support middle income housing in our counties. I don't know if anybody else was there that wants to speak about that quickly, beautiful venue in Schroon Lake. It was my first time there, it was great. Anybody want to speak to this.

THURSTON: I was there, actually sat with Ken.

HUGHES: Yeah

THURSTON: It was a wonderful program, Nicole, of course, was very eloquent in her speech, so it was really nice to see her and Adam from ROOST, you know talking about Essex County in particular.

HUGHES: Yeah

THURSTON: So, certainly affordable housing is an issue everywhere in our County and you know just having that many people in the room was really great.

HUGHES: It was a packed house.

THURSTON: It was.

HUGHES: Yup, thank you for those comments. Anybody else wish to comment who was there? Okay, let's move on now to 2b. There was a conversation about, at our last meeting in February, definitions of blighted properties, unsafe structures and nuisance properties. Before I turn the mic over to Mr. Tansey, I just want to have you take a look at, I think it's page 2 of the document, the packet that I gave you. I went to New York State Department of State, to their local law area, their local law database and I did a search for every single town, whether they had a blighted property law, an unsafe structure law or a nuisance property law. So, you can see here that, again, there's a percentage of error here on my part, but from what I found, there was no local laws at the Department of State that stated that there was a Blighted Property Law. I did find several towns, and you see the dates there that were enacted for Unsafe Structure Laws. Nobody had a nuisance property law except for St. Armand. Several towns did have a junk storage local law, and I marked that with a hashtag next to that nuisance property. So, I assumed that potentially nuisance could also be identified as junk storage law and I put those dates down as well. Again, there's a percentage of errors here, but when it comes to unsafe structure there is at least 7 of our towns that don't have that and so it's possible that this committee might recommend supporting those towns having an unsafe structure law. That might be a directive of this committee, I don't know, to provide just for support to them so that we can deal with blighted properties or again, unsafe structure properties.
So, I want to turn it over to Mr. Tansey and Mr. Manning.

MANNING: Ken, I think there are blighted property local laws on the DOS website. They provide for a blighted property registration system.

HUGHES: Okay

MANNING: And there's a distinction between; there is a subtle distinction between blighted properties and unsafe building. So, there are, I did some, I gave it to Bill, but I pulled 4,5,6 blighted property local laws.

HUGHES: In Essex County?

MANNING: Not in Essex County, throughout the whole State.

HUGHES: Oh, I only looked at Essex County.

MANNING: Okay

HUGHES: I only looked at Essex County.

MANNING: That makes sense.

PIERCE: I am not on this Task Force, but Lewis, you talk about nuisance property, we do have a junk property law on the books.

HUGHES: Okay, that's my margin of error right there. I did a key word search for those words.

O'BRYAN: We also have one.

MANNING: I would guess that you all have one. These are laws that went out in the 80s.

PIERCE: This was back in 1978.

HUGHES: That's a quick, fun point. I think the database on DOS doesn't go back any further than 1998.

MANNING: If it's 78, you may want to update it.

HUGHES: Yeah, 1998 I think is the earliest that it exists on the New York State website, so I would have been privy to that information.
So, the margin of error at least provides for just a set of databases to show that there maybe are some imperfections or maybe opportunities to update.

MANNING: I apologize.

HUGHES: That's okay, that's why we're having this conversation to update our local laws to potentially reflect more modern times.

BARBER: Ken, the Town of Chesterfield does have an unsafe structure law.

HUGHES: Pre-1998?

BARBER: That I couldn't tell you on what date that was actually enacted.

HUGHES: This is that opportunity, if you want to get me that information that would be great. If you have a date then I could update this document just so we have it just for our edification, that would be fine.
So, we were unclear about what the definitions are. We were looking for some legal information about this. So, I will turn it over to Mr. Tansey who's done some awesome work.

TANSEY: Thank you, I put together a small sheet. I described Unsafe Building and Blight Law just in a quick overview. Those would be the two that I would think were pertinent and nuisance in the last one. I think when we think of unsafe laws, unsafe building laws we're thinking of danger, something that is unsafe that is going to cause hurt/harm. Blight laws deal with decline, so we're thinking of declining property values, declining tax income and nuisance, nuisance we're thinking illegal. You're thinking illegal businesses, excessive noise, prostitution, gambling, drugs and when you consider what problem you want to address you also have to consider you're going to enforce this. Just based on those words I used; unsafe building you're going to need a building inspector. Somebody that can determine the building has and is not built correctly and safety. For blight, you're going to need code enforcement or a health department. Somebody who can get in there and see that it is in fact unhealthy or not up to code. Nuisance, you're going to need a police department, someone who can go out there and investigate a drug scene or a drug house, investigate prostitution, investigate gambling. If you were to do nuisance they way a lot of the nuisance laws are put into effect is there are point values. So, if they go out there and find a gambling house, they'll assign two points. If they go out there and find drugs, they'll assign 10 points and if a particular house premise gets 12 points in a year or 12 points in 2 months then you as a town board can institute a hearing, perhaps put on a fine, evict tenants and go down those paths and that would be a nuisance.

Unsafe building; I have said this already. These deal with the structural integrity of the building. We're going to focus on the hazardous, fire risks. Especially houses that are burned out or houses that have suffered a lot of rot and the main structure beams are going to collapse. We want to have a system in place where the building inspector can get out there and see if the people is in fact unsafe. There is a hearing mechanism, some kind of notice to the town board to have a hearing, let the owner have a chance to fight, out forward a defense and then the Town Board can institute some kind of a fine as it so choses.

Blight; in a broad sense is used to describe a neighborhood. So, we're looking at one house that may start to decline, because it's maintained; tall grass, broken windows and then suddenly your neighbors are leaving garbage out, abandoning cars and then now we have 6 houses in the neighborhood with abandoned cars and garbage. So, it affects the entire neighborhood. So, any kind of blight law that is going to have any kind of affect at the town board level has to be focused on an individual property and a lot of times blight is first addressed in the codes. The zoning of the town where you would say that your grass has to be maintained, you can't store abandoned vehicles in your front yard, you can't have a camper in your front yard, garbage has to be picked up once a week, you can't leave garbage out in front of the house and that would be the health department then going out to see that that is not happening or being enforced and again, blight law can establish a procedure for notice to the town board. The town board can have a hearing and then impose some kind of a fine.

Unsafe Buildings Laws; you tend to see things like the town board not liking the fact that the owner has done nothing to maintain it. They determine the building should be demolished and then we demolish it. In Blight Laws; you tend to see things like you're not picking up your garbage; you have broken windows. We're going to give you 30-days to fix, we have a program in town, we have loans available in town for you to come in and get money to fix the broken windows. We have a program to fix the garbage. We can get someone out there to mow the lawn, and we will help to pay for it. Over or not maintaining the blight after it has been picked up on that particular

piece of property, we can put that property on a blighted list, a blighted property list and we can add $2,500, $3,500 to the tax bill on that property in a year.
So, I started by saying that you've got to think about who you have to enforce it, building inspector, code enforcement, health department, police department. When it comes time to imposing a fine, to assess on the taxes, to demolish a building, now you've got to think about how you're going to pay for it. It is very simple to say that we're going to put a $2,500 tax assessment here, but then you're going to foreclose on that property and that $2,500 has to come from somewhere. It either comes from your town coffers, county coffers, grant money, land bank money so it is part of the consideration and when you look at an unsafe building that could be $50,000 to demolish. Again, $50,000 has to come somewhere, the County, town or you have to talk to the Land Bank ahead of time for grant money. And then Blight Laws, it's easy to say, you pay an extra $2,500 but then to collect the $2,500 becomes an issue and then you have a property that has to be foreclosed on. So, these are all sorts of considerations that you have to keep in mind. Each one has a specific purpose. It's very conceivable to draw a draft, draw up a law that covers all three areas; unsafe, blighted properties and then nuisance properties.
That's a quick overview. I know the list that Mr. Hughes gave a lot of towns have already addressed this. If you want to refocus it and you're not on that list for a law, please give me a call and if you want to dive deep into the specific issues and the factors that you're considering and the best path forward. Any questions, concerns?

FOLLOS: Is there a reason why do think no towns in Essex County have adopted a Blighted Property Law and is there town that has a blighted property law that you would consider a good model or template for one of our towns?

TANSEY: I don't know why no town in Essex County has not adopted. I can find you a good example, like Mr. Manning said, there's several towns out there. You can pull 8 or so Blighted Property Laws throughout New York and pull parts that are really, really nice. So, there's not going to be one that you're going to love, there's going to be parts in 2-3 that you're going to like. So, I can do that.

FOLLOS: Okay, we do get a lot of complaints about trash in people's yards. There's one spot in particular that has a dumpster that has been a problem for years. So, I think that might be something that we would want to think about.

TANSEY: Yeah, and I think some towns pick up a lot of the blight issues in their zoning codes.

MANNING: I just want to add to that, trash, section 64 of the town law, allows you, there's a little process there for you to enforce trash enforcement and weeds and stuff like that and Bill did a very good job in explaining the difference between blight and unsafe buildings. Nuisances are a whole other animal; I wouldn't touch them with a 10' pole unless you want to get involved in making lots of laws with different nuisances. There is also common law and there is nuisance that is used often on the books, but that's usually used by property owner versus property owner.
I can kind of answer the reason why none of the Towns in Essex County have a Blighted Property Law or Blighted Property Registry. Clayton has asked me on many occasions, I have a whole file on it, and I gave Bill some of the stuff. My resistance was that and this is a difficult situation, and I represent the County and I also represent you guys, but when I have an issue that involves a bit

of a conflict between the County and the Town, it's difficult for me to walk that tight rope. The Blighted Property Local Laws and also the Unsafe Building Laws have a component that allows, that you go do this and all charges are then put on the tax warrant and the County has to pay for the tax warrant, and those charges can run the gamut from tearing down a building, which gets very expensive to enforcing your Blight Property Local Law. A lot of Blighted Property Local Laws have yearly filings if your house or property is determined to be blighted then you can be, you will assess you a registration fee of $1,500 up to $3,500. Those things can accumulate into a lot of money, they get put on the tax rolls and then we, the County, has to make good on the warrant. Whether the County gets that money back in foreclosure is questionable. So, Clayton has asked me on many occasions, and I have never did it because I was kind of torn between my allegiance to the County. On those blighted property local laws that I have seen, they have allowed that to be placed on tax rolls. I am not sure whether that's an issue that should be explored, I am not sure whether that is correct. Somebody lifted that off of unsafe building or under Section 64 of the Town Law. You can assess something like that generally on the tax rolls without it being in statute would be my opinion. Some maybe that's in some statute somewhere in blighted properties, I have never seen it. I have never delved into it. So, that may not even be legal. So, that's the reason that no one here has one. It would be easy for everyone here to have one if you want one. Bill will just grab some of those laws, cobble it together, come up with what he thinks is best and, away you go. But my resistance it doing it was because everything seemed to be put on the County's back for the warrant and I get it. So, if that's okay with the County, if you guys as the County decide.

MASCARENAS: It's not.

MANNING: I know, Mike and I talk about this a lot.

MASCARENAS: I've got 6 million reasons why it's not okay.

MANNING: I agree, I mean those things start to pile up.

MASCARENAS: Yeah, they do.

MANNING: Thankfully you guys are not tearing down tons of, we have what's her face, Nicole Justice-Green, sorry about that, no disrespect, I just couldn't think of her name. She's tearing down stuff, she's doing great, she's getting money for you guys and that's great. But, if that runs dry and then all of sudden you decide, let's all do this and stick it on the tax rolls. Then that would be very expensive to the County. It could get up there.
And then one other thing on blighted properties, if I call, vacancy can be considered blight. So, if a property is vacant for like a couple of years under some of those blighted property laws, they get no assist and even though they're vacant, they may be boarded up. If they're boarded up, they're going to comply with your unsafe buildings law, because they're no danger. They may be fixed, they may be boarded, but they can still be blighted if they're vacant. So, that is my two cents, and thank you, Bill. That was a great thing.

BARBER: So, I just want to, I have been here 6 years, I have tried the unsafe building law there are just so many things, loopholes. I had a person, specifically downtown, with his buildings falling

apart and these are attached building where a lot of my businesses are downtown. Tried the unsafe building law, had him come in, first of all trying to get him to even accept, we sent certified letters, contacted him several times, I had my code officer contact him. He was returning calls in the beginning and then quit taking calls, finally get done and then the guys goes into bankruptcy, and I am notified, he's in bankruptcy, got to stop, can't do anything while he's in bankruptcy, got to wait until you're out. I had that conversation, Mike Diskin mentioned to Dan. So, the unsafe building law, to me you might just as well left it that I don't have one because trying to enforce it is totally ridiculous as far as I am concerned and then getting your court to apply.

HUGHES: That's it.

BARBER: Getting your judges to get them there in court and stuff and then when they get there then they give them so much time. Blight laws, just from me saying, as soon as I get a law I want to be the first one to adopt it because just by my Board talking about it and every meeting, I have had a couple of places that have cleaned up their property because I mentioned to them, they're going to get a $2,500 yearly fine. These same people wait their 3 years before they pay their taxes and then they pay their taxes because they're not that much and it's worth keeping the property and I think if you add the extra $2,500, this person downtown, commercials up to $5,000, that's the figure that you threw out that time and he's one of them that will go 2 year, 3 years before he pays his taxes. If he had a $5,000 fine, he's either not going to pay his taxes at the end of the 3 years or he doesn't do nothing and I got other people complaining. Why should they live, when you're sitting there doing a revalu on properties and they come to you, come to your Town Board and say, I'm living next to a dump and you guys don't do nothing about it. How is my land coming up in value when I have been living next to this dump? I think blight property law with that fine yearly, I think it will make people move on the subject, just like that extra thing. Like you say, what people to do something, hit them in the pocket. They either do or they get.

MANNING: Clayton, too, I just want to, our, we're back on every year's foreclosure timeline, because Covid messed everything up. That's why it was a 3-year one and that's a consideration, too, and then you know, get back to what the County has to make good on the warrant would be less, because you wouldn't have 3-4 years built up, $2,500. Some might just be $2,500 if the County eats it. I really do think the County needs to make a decision on all these things. We kind of made a quasi-decision on taxes, back taxes and all that, but then you've got unsafe building section 64 and blighted property fines that get put back on the warrant and what do you want to do with them.

THURSTON: So, I just had a couple of comments. So, most of us I think or probably all of here have formally adopted New York State Uniformed Fire Protection and Building Code, that does have property maintenance codes in there that certainly your Code Enforcement Officer can do a code violation on any property for property maintenance regardless of whether you have a blight property. I absolutely agree with Clayton, you know, if it goes in front of a Judge, we have to have our judges actually follow through. So, you know, in your Town, if you have a Judge that maybe is cousins or something with whoever this person is, send it to the next Town over and eliminate that problem.
As far as the Nuisance Abatement Local Law, St. Armand looks like the only one that actually has one and our Nuisance Abatement Local Law boils down to one simple premise, if you are doing

something on your property that makes it so their neighbor cannot peacefully enjoy their own property then you need to stop doing whatever you're doing and I hate to say this out loud but 9 times out of 10 for me it's roosters. But that Nuisance Abatement Law works, you know and I call folks up and say, hey, your rooster is bothering your neighbor, they have asked you 10 times, if you don't take care of your rooster and I do have a farm out of town that takes roosters and has on many occasions and that actually works for me and it's on our website and I think Dan actually drew it up in 2014, I believe it was, but it's a good local law and it does help. So, Clayton send it to the next town over, and you know code violate, code violate, code violate. It's there, we have it.

BARBER: Another on the Unsafe Building Law, you know you put up with it for so many years and you come, obviously to the County and say, okay then I am going to have this property cleaned up and then you're adding the expense, which I know Mike you don't want too much of an expense and then it comes up to $60,000-$70,000 and then you come to the conclusion is the property really worth that when you get done cleaning it up and you've got to make it a piece of land two-thirds of an acre or one acre, how much is it worth? It is worth $60,000-$70,000 plus what's owed on back taxes and stuff?

THURSTON: It's tough

MASCARENAS: Let me go to that, because it keeps coming up. In terms of the County and the expense. You're right, it can get quite high. The annual warrant it excessive that we pay out to all the taxing entities within Essex County to make them whole and be able to pay their bills. The thought process behind that was you would recoup those dollars during the resale of the property. We know that Hennepin has kind of put a wrinkle in that. So, we're never going to break even again, we're also going to lose. We mostly always lost to begin with. A couple of auctions prior to, property values went up and we did make a little bit of money. This most recent auction though and here is what I can tell you, I'm not sure there's a way that I am aware of that the County isn't going to have to pay. So, what's been happening, Dan gave you the one scenario of you do the work locally, you take on your responsibility and then the money goes on the warrant, the County makes you whole and we're never going to sell it for the $70,000-$80,000 that just got pushed to the warrant because of your removal, we're going to take a loss. What happened in this last auction is houses that didn't get sold, I am dealing with it now. So, I've got without naming any names or any towns, we've had to do clean up at one property, we just were sighted on another one. Now I haven't owned this property only since about November, so these were properties that were in disarray for long periods of time and the County takes ownership and all of a sudden communities want to do something about it, but for 30 years they didn't, a property in that condition since November and I am having to pay for it anyway. The only difference is, I cant get the reimbursement because now we're the owner. So, if the property would have sold for more dollars, we would have been okay, but now the County is the owner and responsible for whatever code violations happen on that property until sale. So, I think too, that's what comes back from your Committee, and where we've been trying really hard, all these conversations are part of the larger conversation of who is going to share the responsibility and who's going to help in paying it. The Town of Jay, when we were in that position once said, hey Mike we'll split the cost with you and I am like, okay done. That's the first community that has ever offered to throw some money at what I perceive as some of their own issues in terms of dealing with it and that's where

your Committee kind of came in and we said well, we'll look at everything on a case by case basis basically because there's not always a black and white answer. There's a lot of gray when it comes to housing and how did that house get into that condition to begin with and what happened there, but I think having that shared responsibility is the only access, short of pushing the entire cost onto the County. Because if we take the property, I get the cost, if we don't take the property and you deal with it, we still get the costs. So, I'm sure what the better way is short of communities feeling like, if they feel like this is really an important issue to them then a shared mechanism for that expenditure probably shouldn't be off the table, because we already paid you for that tax. We already made you whole on it, so then to come back and pay even more on it seems extreme for me, but I want our County to look nice. I want the Town I live in to be nice. I have been dealing with housing for an awful long time. I was the County Planner. It's a subject that never seems to improve and we have actually come a long way in the last few years. We have given ourselves some more tools, but there's just tools, we need more tools and how do we deal with this blight issue is a really big question.

MANNING: Mike, probably for the last 10 years I have sent letters to the Board giving all these options and everybody looks at it and nothing happens. I can't even recall what they said, but some of them said stuff like, set up a fund here at the County to take care of these expenses and have it shared, suggest that each town contribute yearly, maybe $8,000 per Town, to this fund and that fund can then be used to reimburse the County or to do projects or you can budget, you can simply budget without any help from the Towns to do these things. But I think I probably sent about 4-5 letters, 2-3 page letters on this, I can hunt up now that we have this Committee which is great to kind of reexamine these issues.

O'BRYAN: I just wanted to say a couple of different things. First of all, I appreciate you bringing this up, let me back up, my former life as a Justice in this County, I can tell you I had a number of these cases over the years that came before my bench. What the Town Attorney would do or what the Court would do is we try to get this person to move in the right direction and explain the law to them, explain why they're out of compliance with the law and what it's going to take to get in compliance and give them time to do that and in pretty much every case we were successful with getting that done. In that said, there's always those few that you can't and you have to proceed forward with their sanctions. We, right now, are going through some work in Ticonderoga, looking at ourselves, because I said to my team as we started this year, the Town is dirty and if we're going to attract business and attract people to want to invest in our community we're going to have to clean up ourselves and so we've started that. Actually, DEC had 5 members, investigators, in one part of our town. We didn't call them, they came because there was another problem that fits right into wants going on with blighted properties and they're looking at where there are potentially been illegal businesses running for periods of times and so they came in and we were with them, my Code Enforcement Officer was with them last week as they went through this property out there. So, we're going to do some work on blighted. We have a plan for doing that across the town in the next several months into the year. One thing that we do have that's not here; is we do have a Nuisance Law. We do enforce the nuisance law. Typically, we enforce it when we had had properties where drugs are being dealt out of and that's the only way that we really could crack on to some of this stuff is to apply the Nuisance Law. We have a point system, right now I think we have one place let that is boarded up right now because of the nuisance law and we just passed, it was a 6-month, the law was in place for that building and it was just up for

another 6-months in Ticonderoga and we had one prior to this that we used this same law for to help us to rid ourselves of that illegal activity and it worked and it has worked very well. It's not easy, as Mr. Manning was saying, but we have not any repercussion from it, that I can tell you at this point.

HUGHES: I just want to follow up on something that Mike said. This is not just about the aesthetics of the communities, which is really is. I can think of 15 homes, I have pictures of them in my office, of these blighted properties, of these unsafe structure properties. That's 15 families that I can have living in Essex, contributing to the school, contributing to any number of employee opportunities and volunteerism opportunities and we all have that. Every single Supervisor in this room has that opportunity as well and I've got the smallest town in the entire County when it comes to geographic size. So, we have a really wonderful, yet imperfect, but really wonderful solution with the Land Bank. My purpose as I take the Chairmanship of this Committee and begin to move it forward it's this year is what else can we do and what are the other options that we can enact and that we can take advantage of that are already at our disposal that you were speaking of Davina, that we can begin to lean on and educate ourselves on a little bit more. So, I, absolutely hear the frustration in your voice, Mr. Barber. I think we all have that frustration to a certain degree, and I am glad that you are voicing that here, it is the perfect place to voice that. It's that frustration that I want to turn into some type of actionable item that we can recommend, either through common cause, common conversation or just getting more sure of ourselves when it comes to the local laws that we have or improving those local laws to give them some more teeth.
I want to shift just for time purposes; I want to shift into another conversation that was brought up in February when it comes to County code enforcement. There is a conversation, I know it's brewing and budding a little bit about why doesn't the County just take over code enforcement, right? So, several of us in here have the same Code Enforcement Officer named Colin Mangan. Colin lives in the Town of Schroon, but he does code enforcement office work for 6 towns in this County, a third of the towns. So, a couple of days after we last spoke in February, together, I pulled him aside and had a conversation with him about what the pros and cons are and I thought he did a really good job of kind of enumerating some of those and I just wanted to go over it, because it's not as easy, I know Mike could have told me that in a heartbeat and Dan could have as well, it's not as easy as we might think. Could it potentially happen in the future? Yes, it potentially could if we as Towns are put in-between a rock and a hard place because we are obligated by New York State to provide code enforcement, obligated and could Towns be sued if we don't provide code enforcement? Absolutely, we could. So, those are positions that none of us as Supervisors want to be in. Moving it to the County has some pros but it has a lot of cons, too. So, I wanted to just share this document with you and just go over it, maybe for 5 minutes just to get it on the record. These are Colin's ideas that he shared with me based on his perspective from the six towns that he works with. Right now, if you shifted it to the County, you have to think that there's going to be a much higher degree of accountability. In local towns the accountability might be a little bit lower because there are neighbors that are doing that kind of code work and it's an interpretation, but when you bring it up to the County level, you're bringing it to a higher level of responsibility and accountability because now you're a County Officer providing code enforcement work. Some towns, in Number Two, Zoning and Codes; some Towns have one person doing both, shifting code enforcement to the County would force the Town to hire its own Zoning Officer. So, you may be doing two in one with one person at a town level, but

if you take that Code Officer out of that equation, now you have to rehire for a Zoning Officer and the may or may not want more money to perform that singular function.
Nuisance, Garbage, Junk Laws; he stated that local laws, if there are not already in existence, would need to be on the books to allow the Zoning Officer to enforce so you would actually have to have those, that language, he feels, legally for that Zoning Officer to do the work.

MANNING: Are you talking Zoning Officer or Code?

HUGHES: I apologize, Code Officer.
And just geographic distances, so if you need a building permit and you're going to get the from a Code Enforcement Officer through the County, that may require a person to drive much further than your local town hall to get that permit which the applicant may or may not want to do. There's issues with benefits, vehicles, administrative costs, municipal projects. So, we also as Town Officials can build our project, we can build things that we need to build for the betterment of our town. I know when I built a salt shed, I think it was a sale shed, my Code Officer was my Building Inspector for that salt shed, I may lose out on that local control and so he's the General Contractor for some of those projects and now with that shift through the County, that's a great question and we don't have those answers. And of course, software and technology, if you have it at the County level, you're going to have the County purchase software and that investment in technology to allow them to do the work that they need to do.
There are some pros; one less department for the Supervisor and individual town to manage. Staffing at County levels allow for backup, so for example you had 5-6 individuals providing full time code services for the 18 towns, if somebody is sick or somebody is on maternity leave or something happened and they couldn't fulfil their responsibility, in a town right now you might be out of luck, you would have to do a share service agreement but at the County you would have somebody potentially to back that person up. Warren County actually has a county model; I did not know that. So, that's something that Essex County could study if it ever felt like it needed to determine the feasibility in our County. So, I just wanted to provide this to you. There are more cons that pros at this time. I think all 18 of us have a Code Officer to perform those functions, which is wonderful at the moment and that will change, I am sure, in the short or long term and when it does, we're still stuck with a town needing to find. I do shutter at the day that the Town of Schroon's Code Officer retires, because Colin has made it very clear that he wishes to work in the town in which he lives, right and good for him. I totally get that. So, Meg, you stand to have a windfall of success with Colin when he moves, when he decides to resign, but that is going to leave 6 of our towns in a tough, tough spot. Will we be able to backfill that? I don't know that answer. Will the County have to come in? I don't know that answer, but it is coming. I don't know how many years your current Code Officer has left in his career.

WOOD: It's changing.

HUGHES: So, that is inevitability.

MENSER: Crown Point might hire Colin full-time.

HUGHES: And take him away from the rest of us? You're going to be a real fast friend in this room.

MASCARENAS: I will add for those of you that are unaware, the County used to have Codes.

HUGHES: I was unaware.

MASCARENAS: This Board voted to dismantle the Essex County Code Department in favor of having their own locally. I am not aware of all of the reasons why. The most I can get, I have one woman that still remains employed here that worked for that department before it was dismantled and she can only provide me guesses, she was young, she was new. It was 35 years ago and there's not a lot of record as to what the office did, what their reasoning was for getting rid of that department and taking the responsibility. I am guessing a lot of it is the cons that are listed here, probably the local control and those types of things. So, I will continue to look for information on that because it was before me and I came in 1999. So, I want to say it was in the late 80's.

MANNING: I want to say it was when I was here.

MASCARENAS: I've been here longer than you. So, we have more to come on that.

HUGHES: Awesome, moving on to Section Three; we're not going to go through each one of these except for one topic. But I want to remind you, if you see something on here that really jazzes you and you want to get involved in trying to find a solution, these are just topics that I have thought of and I have put down based on conversations we have. The Land Bank started because of a presentation and a couple of us where like, we want to know more and so a couple of us got involved and we did all the research and we started getting the experts in and then it was a matter of convincing our colleagues and demonstrating that there was feasibility and then that's how that happened. It started with a spark from an outside organization and then it grew and grew and grew and grew. So, if there is something that you see here, don't expect me to take charge of that. I am not going to do that, please don't wait for me. I just want to organization the conversation. If you want help, I will absolutely support you in that process. But if you see something on here, that's like I want to know more about that because it's important for my town or you think it could morph into something at the County level, please let me know, let someone else know in this room and let's start going for it. Let me know and I am fully willing and able to support you in that leadership process. So, take charge of something if you think that's there something in here that you really, really want to dive into and please don't wait. The crisis of housing is too important to just sit back. I know we're all busy but if you find that you have an extra couple of minutes in a month or a day, please dive in and let me know and we will start making that more of a priority and we'll work with our County leaders to make sure that they're aware so that we can get their perspectives, historically, so we're on the right path.
I did provide you with this document right here, which is brand new to the County, from the Lake Champlain/Lake George Regional Planning Board. It is that Blighted Property Inventory for the County, from a countywide perspective. Beth and crew did a really wonderful job of providing information, some maps and also on the second to last page, some recommendations on what they feel what might be worthwhile for the County to endeavor into. So, instead of us trying to reinvent the wheel, again, if you have an idea of something that you want to tackle in Section Three, let's go for it but also Beth and her team from the professional standpoint, they've created some ideas that may or may not work in Essex County. Don't really know, right, don't really know,

but if there's something that you see in here that you think that this Task Force should be tackling, let's get on that let that become the focus. Those things, may not just a singular focus but let those things become the focus of this Task Force, so we can potentially have a product at the end of this year or the end of next year that we can bring to the Board of Supervisors for conversation and consideration or maybe it's just taking this document that I have provided with the noes and turning some of those noes into yeses and so dates, possibly and again I will reiterate, if you think I am wrong on some of this, please tell me the dates so that I can add that to here so that I can make that a more perfect document.
In your packet, also, there are just some good news things that I provided from the press. The Town of Moriah received a Pro-Housing Community Grant and again, from the SUN, Marist Poll showing that housing is still the number one issue for New Yorkers and I have provided some of the date related to that. I have not digested all of that, but I just wanted to provide it to you in case that floats your boat. Those kinds of data numbers, we are on the right track, I am thrilled that we have a full house today. I really appreciate everybody being here. I don't necessarily have anything more for this conversation. One the back of the agenda, just some ongoing efforts that are taking place throughout the County that I just want to make sure that we're staying on top of and our next meeting will be after Ways and Means, unless there is anybody else here who want to speak to any of the topics that we talked about today?

FOLLOS: I just want to clarify, so the blighted property, the fine, that's assessed by the Town Board not the Town Judge, am I understanding that correctly?

TANSEY: I think the way you design the law you can make either way. You can have the criminal component and the other is going to civil component treated differently, but either way there needs to be a procedure put in place. It needs to be clear by the Local Law, and both sides need a clear opportunity to present their sides.

FOLLOS: Thank you.

TANSEY: The Town Board is the one that's going to be able to put it on the taxes. The criminal court is just on the person.

REUSSER: Bill, is it in your agenda to, you mentioned earlier about taking different blighted laws throughout the State and you know, we pick and chose what would work best for our particular communities, is that something that you're actually doing? Or you're just suggesting that we have our own town attorneys, do it?

TANSEY: I still use future verb tense, I can bring can put something together and bring it in, yes. Kind of coalesce some ideas that I see under blighted properties and bring it in, at least provoke a discussion of certain points or questions to add to that, yes.

REUSSER: I would appreciate that and disseminate it to all.

HUGHES: From my perspective and I missed because I was having a sidebar, I am 1000% behind dealing with blighted properties and trying to do what we can to remediate blighted properties and get our neighborhoods improved and get families into those remediated properties in an

affordable way. I don't know what that looks like, I know the Land Bank is doing that. I want to find other ways to do it so we're not solely relying on that, but blighted property is my up here raison d'etre for being up here right now. I just really want to see opportunities to improve that throughout the County and hopefully throughout the North Country.

BARBER: So, my question would be and in my own opinion, I would think that we would all want to be on the same page as far fines. But when you talk about the Town Board actually being able to put in on the taxes because if you go to the court and correct me if I'm wrong, if you go to the court system and it's just the person is up for the fine but again, we have so many fines now that aren't paid and there's usually nothing done about and I am talking mostly that I know of, of traffic fines that aren't paid. So, would it be in the next interest for all of us to put it to the Town Board so we're able to put it on the taxes. So, they either pay the taxes or they lose the property?

TANSEY: I don't think, it's impossible to say yes or no, because each circumstance is going to be different but if you're going to impose it on the individual as a criminal fine, maybe you only have a tenant, maybe it's a non-property owner, then going to a criminal court and imposing a fine is the better way of doing it. Once you impose the fine, you got to go through a process of setting up a judgement to collect in the future, collect on their property in the future. So, it's really a two-step process. If you keep it at the Town Board level, now you just got to make sure that you a hearing, town boards are right for appeal, they're right for not following procedure, so that has to be set in place, but it's the Town Board that is going to put that financial burden on the tax bill, yes and then that comes back to the very beginning of the discussion or the discussion that we had at the very beginning of the meeting, is who is going to absorb that tax burden? Is it going to be the taxpayers? Is it going to the Town? Or is it going to be the County? Somebody has to pay for it, that money doesn't come out of nowhere.

MANNING: On an unsafe building, I have found, I am the Town Attorney for the Town of Jay, and we have probably 7-8 or my tenure, I think it's a great vehicle. The only problem is, is who's going to pay for the demolition and now that we have Nicole's team that are doing great work there, if you can get them to agree with you, like they did in Jay with the last one, that's an excellent way to teardown an unsafe building, as long as it's unsafe. That's a $64,000 question, too.
And as Bill said, I think in any Local Law, you can put a civil component, which is a registration fee, that I think you're talking about, where they have to register as a blighted property and if they don't do anything, then you take the next step and it gets placed on that taxes. That's one aspect, the other aspect is a criminal or civil fee, either one, at the Town Justice level, which as you say, never gets paid. There's a lot to it.

HUGHES: I lovely conversation, this is awesome, super great. Anybody else wishes to speak?

MORSE: I just have an update, when I look over your list on the agenda, the Community Services Board has increased their desire to figure out how we can better support those individuals that the Community Services Board serves. People with mental health issues, people with intellectual developmental disabilities and people that have substance use disorders. A lot of times those individuals also have poverty as part of their, of the mix. So, as we watch the numbers of homeless people that are seeking support for the Department of Social Services go up and a few of you call me and say, this person is street homeless in my community, how can you help me? I think they

have a mental health issue and sometimes you get frustrated with my answer. But clearly, we need more housing for individuals that are unhoused or lack housing. So, the Community Services Board, as the need is increasing, their awareness and their desire to come together and figure out the solution is increasing, which is great. So, we are going to be hosting, not a forum, not a big meeting, but maybe a dozen to a dozen and half people that have, you know that housing and the population is near and dear to their hearts. So, I am asking you, I've got a handful of people that are interested, but I am asking you guys if there's like a church, pastor, church in your towns that are coming to you and saying, like these people are always at my door looking for money and they don't have anywhere to do, there's no place for them to go, would love to have somebody in the clergy world at our table because I think that a lot of the people that I am talking about tend to go to their local church and ask for support and not always is the church able to support. I would love to replicate what's going on in the Frankin County area with their ecumenical solution to supporting individuals that have housing needs, transitional housing needs.

HUGHES: Thank you for reminding us that it's not just an economical issue but there are also other challenges out there that require housing needs.

MORSE: I appreciate you hearing that, too.

HUGHES: Thank you, absolutely. Anybody else have any other topics out there, today?
Thank you for the fruitful conversation, we will keep working over the month and we will see you on May 26, after Ways and Means. We're adjourned, thank you.

THERE WAS NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THIS TASK FORCE WAS ADJOURNED AT 11:57 AM.

Respectively Submitted,

Dina Garvey, Deputy Clerk
Board of Supervisors