

MINUTES - PLANNING BOARD

Meeting of May 17, 2023

A public meeting of the Cranford Planning Board was called to order by Ms. Kellett on May 17, 2023 at 7:33 p.m. Ms. Kellett announced in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Open Public Meetings Act, the Westfield Leader and the Star Ledger have been notified and the agenda posted in the municipal building as required.

1. ROLL CALL

Members Present:

Ms. Kellett
Mr. Nordelo
Mayor Andrews
Deputy Mayor Gareis
Ms. Pedde
Ms. Rappa
Ms. Sen
Mr. Taylor – Arrived at 7:39 pm

Members Absent:

Ms. Didzbalis

Alternates Present:

Mr. Leber
Mr. Pistol

Alternates Absent:

None

Also present:

Joseph Tauriello Esq., Board Attorney (appearing for Jonathan Drill, Esq.), Kathy Lenahan, Board Administrator, Nicholas Dickerson, Board Planner, Jacqueline Dirmann, Board Engineer

2. MINUTES

A motion to adopt the closed session minutes of March 1, 2023 was made by Mr. Nordelo, seconded by Mr. Leber and passed on roll call vote:

Affirmative: Ms. Kellett, Mr. Nordelo, Mayor Andrews, Ms. Rappa, Ms. Sen, Mr. Leber, Mr. Pistol

Opposed: None

A motion to adopt the official minutes of March 1, 2023 was made by Mr. Nordelo, seconded by Mr. Pistol and passed on roll call vote:

Affirmative: Ms. Kellett, Mr. Nordelo, Mayor Andrews, Ms. Rappa, Ms. Sen, Mr. Leber, Mr. Pistol

Opposed: None

A motion to adopt the official minutes of March 15, 2023, as amended, was made by Mr. Pistol, seconded by Mr. Nordelo and passed on roll call vote:

Affirmative: Ms. Kellett, Mr. Nordelo, Mayor Andrews, Deputy Mayor Gareis, Ms. Pedde, Ms. Rappa, Ms. Sen, Mr. Pistol

Opposed:

3. RESOLUTIONS:

None

4. COMMUNICATIONS

None

5. OLD/NEW BUSINESS

None

PUBLIC MEETING – Immediately following the Workshop – Council Chambers

1. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT

Ms. Kellett called a public meeting of the Cranford Planning Board to order on May 17, 2023, at 7:49 p.m. Ms. Kellett announced this meeting is in compliance with the “Open Public Meetings Act” as adequate notice of this meeting has been provided to the Westfield Leader and the Star Ledger with the agenda specifying the time, place and matters to be heard having been posted on a bulletin board in the Town Hall reserved for such announcements and the filing of said agenda with the Township Clerk of Cranford. Formal action may be taken at this meeting.

2. ROLL CALL:

Members Present:

Ms. Kellett
Mr. Nordelo
Mayor Andrews
Deputy Mayor Gareis
Ms. Pedde
Ms. Rappa
Ms. Sen
Mr. Taylor

Members Absent:

Ms. Didzbalis

Alternates Present:

Mr. Leber
Mr. Pistol

Alternates Absent:

None

Also present:

Joseph Tauriello Esq., Board Attorney (appearing on behalf of Jonathan Drill, Esq.), Kathy Lenahan, Board Administrator, Nicholas Dickerson, Board Planner, Jacqueline Dirmann, Board Engineer

3. Application: #PB 22-001
Applicant: AVIDD Services of NJ Inc.
73-91 Myrtle Street
Block: 573 Lots: 9, 10, & 12.02, R-3 Zone

The applicant in this matter is seeking Minor Subdivision and Preliminary and Final Major Site Plan – Residential approval and c(2) variance relief to construct two group homes for low income developmentally disabled individuals. (See attached list of c(2) variances/exceptions).

Gary Goodman, Esq. appeared. Stated he represents the applicant AVIDD. Described the property and the application. Property is owned by the Township, if application is approved, two of the lots will be subdivided. This is a permitted use in the Zone. Two of the three lots were described as the Myrtle Street Needs Site in the 2021 Housing Element and Fair Share Plan. Reviewed the variances they are requesting.

All witnesses for the applicant and the Board professionals were sworn in together.

Terry McKeon appeared and stated he is the CEO of AVIDD Community Services of NJ.

Questions from Mr. Goodman to Mr. McKeon ascertained the following:

They provide residential services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. They have 17 group homes. They operate as families with four individuals in each home. They are licensed by the Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities. They accept people who have been screened and could have children, young people or elderly people. There are 3000 people waiting for placement in these group homes. The State would like them to also take people out of nursing homes. The State is allowing two group homes next to each other so they can take people who are medically fragile, and the nurses could be shared by the two houses. All individuals have a very low income and must be eligible for Medicaid. Some of the money comes from the individuals Social Security payments. AVIDD takes 75% of their Social Security and provides what Medicaid does not cover. Some of the 25% that is left from Social Security, is to cover rent, although the rent is also subsidized by the Department of Consumer Affairs. Each home has three eight hour shifts for 24-hour supervision. There are two to three people on each shift. There would be a manager there during the day. They would probably also have a nurse on staff. Depending on the illness, they may have nursing around the clock.

There would be three staff for each house on a shift. It might vary in the evenings, depending on the level of disabilities. There would be one van per home. Usually it is a maximum of two-wheel chairs per house. The funding requires them to operate the homes as group homes. Deliveries might be Amazon, but there would be no big trucks coming to the site. The daily schedule depends on the ages and the services needed by the residents. Some individuals go to a day program or a senior recreation program.

Questions from the Board for this witness ascertained the following:

No special requirements needed for first responders. A key for the front door may be required by the Fire Department. The vans would be parked in the lot they will build. There would be no one younger than 18 at the group homes. Did get an approval for a Federal Home Loan. The staffing ratio is usually 3 to 1. The land will be conveyed to AVIDD. They may provide transportation if someone is going to a day program, or if within 10 miles radius, they will be picked up. They can request individuals from the Cranford area for placement in these group homes. They have to be approved by the Division of Developmental Disabilities. Stated it is a long process. Visiting is open door, but request they give the home a call. Some residents do go home on weekends. The transaction is \$1.00 for the conveyance of the land. Their developer is Monarch, who found out that the Town was interested in affordable housing and contacted AVIDD. The applicant consents to a deed restriction to maintain the homes as group homes.

Questions from Mr. Dickerson, Board Planner, to this witness ascertained the following:

They will speak to the business across the street, the Christmas Tree Shop, to park any overflow cars in that lot.

Ms. Kellett asked if anyone from the Public had questions for this witness, the following appeared:

Bobby Anstatt – 587 Ludlow Avenue – Asked about differences between a minor and major development.

Mr. Goodman stated it refers to a subdivision and a two or three lot subdivision is considered minor. They are the applicant, who has a proposal, the Township is the owner and signed off on the application for them to be here.

Ms. Dirmann stated in there is a definition in the stormwater section and if the application is defined as a major development it needs to comply with the major development stormwater standards.

Diane Price – 612 Hory Street – Asked about how they found the property and is it just for special needs.

Mr. McKeon stated there are regulations on how many group homes can be next to one another. The Town of Cranford approached them to come and development group homes on these properties. They go wherever there is availability.

Colleen McGovern – 587 Ludlow Avenue – Asked who specifically from the Township reached out to them.

Mr. McKeon stated it was Monarch Housing that reached out to them. Monarch was approached by someone in the Township government, he does not have a name.

Thomas Kash – 586 Ludlow Avenue – Asked about the level of disabilities people might have who would live there. Asked about safety, since it is a very busy street. Asked about any violence in the group homes and about parking. Asked about the natural barrier and how they would keep that aspect.

Mr. McKeon stated they would all be developmentally disabled. Might also have mental illness. Stated that the staff always has eye contact on the residents. All activities would be in the back yard and a staff person would always have to be with them. They don't take people who have severe behavioral problems. You can park on Myrtle, but will try to rent spaces across the street. They want privacy as well and possible could put up a fence. There will be trees, but they try to work with the neighbors to ensure they see as little of Myrtle Street as possible.

Theresa Perez Ramos - 615 Hory Street – Asked about their other homes being on such a busy street. Asked about properties being added to the Master Plan for affordable housing and removing them from the Plan. Asked about the land not being buildable, the wooded area and about the illumination off of Commerce Drive.

Mr. Goodman stated they were not involved in the background, they were only involved in the Township of Cranford designating the area where they would like to see special needs housing.

Mr. McKeon stated most of the homes are not on a busy street. Stated he did drive by in the evening.

Diego Ramos – 615 Hory Street – Asked about having Cranford residents having preference to the units and making it a condition in the deed restriction.

Mr. McKeon – Stated some of the residents waiting might be residents of Cranford, he could try to find as many Cranford residents as possible, but he cannot guarantee it. Would not be agreeable to putting it in a deed restriction.

Jason Sciuлло appeared and presented his qualification and was accepted as an expert in engineering and planning.

Questions from Mr. Goodman to Mr. Sciuлло ascertained the following:

Presented Exhibit A-1, a colorized version of the subdivision and site plan already submitted. The bright colors outline the proposed work over an aerial photo. Currently, there are three lots and they are proposing an adjustment of the three lots. Two lots will be conveyed to the applicant and the remaining 100-foot square will remain Township owned. Discussed the topography of the site. Everything drains to a ditch on Ludlow. The stormwater management feature is on the right side of the site. It will accommodate the increase in impervious coverage for the development, as well as picking up drainage from the parcels behind that drain toward this development. There will be a reduction in the flow rates leaving the site. They will be adding two rows of evergreens at the rear of the property. Also proposing a row of Green Giant arborvitaes, along with landscaping around the property. They will be single family residential homes.

The use is permitted, but they will be adjusting the lot lines. The parking area will be shared. There will be a one-way driveway. Parking spaces proposed will face away from the neighbors. Myrtle Street has two-hour parking on both sides, visitors could park there. Proposing sidewalks across the frontage. They could put a pedestrian connection from the end of their sidewalk to the street. There are site lights for the parking area. The stormwater feature is an open infiltration basin shared between both lots. Reviewed the relief they are seeking from the bulk requirements, which includes front yard setback, maximum impervious coverage, side yard setback, generator in the front yard, and not having a garage. The relief from the design waivers are for parking setback, number of foot candles for site lighting, heights of poles, for look-alike design, and for a tree replacement plan.

Questions from Mr. Goodman to Mr. Scullo regarding Ms. Dirmann's Review Letter of May 10, 2023 ascertained the following:

The trees were not surveyed. There will be a cross access easement to cover ingress and egress, stormwater management, and parking. Sidewalk is to match the sidewalk to the West.

Ms. Dirmann stated sidewalks are usually 2 feet from the curb line, they are proposing about 7 feet to match existing house on Myrtle. Could have a crosswalk to cross Myrtle. Crosswalk would be at proposed sidewalk.

Mr. McKeon stated the residents may want to walk with the staff and they prefer a sidewalk.

Discussion was held regarding the encroachments that are on the property. The encroachments are on Lot 2 which has some clearing, Lot 3 has a brick pad with firepit and landscaping, Lot 4 has nothing, Lot 5 has a playset and a concrete pad, Lot 6 & 7 have nothing and Lot 8 has a shed and landscaping.

Mr. Goodman stated it would be an effort between the buyer and the seller to get those encroachments removed so that they can do the plantings in the rear area as proposed.

Mr. Scullo stated an ambulance will fit and they will provide a turning template as a condition of approval. There will be a staggered evergreen buffer. There are 8 trees proposed plus there are two existing that will remain.

Ms. Dirmann asked about the connection for the undeveloped lot and her preference would be an 8-inch extension to the sanitary sewer main.

Mr. Scullo stated they would not be able to fund that.

A straw poll was taken to see if the Board preferred a six-inch or eight-inch pipe. The poll was 6 to 4 in favor of a six-inch pipe.

Mr. Scullo stated the refuse is the same as any other single-family home and they have no medical waste. There will be 82 arborvitaes with a planting height of 6 to 8 feet. Stormwater management will be an infiltration system. The basin will store .7 feet. They are improving runoff and not impacting the neighbors since everything runs from them to this property. There will be a fence around the basin. Snow will be pushed to the lawn area as to not impact any parking.

Ms. Dirmann stated they are proposing a green infrastructure Best Management Practice from the State. The sand acts as a water quality, provides recharge and is an acceptable method.

Questions from the Board for this witness ascertained the following:

The soil will balance out from what is excavated. They understand there are issues now with the neighbors' properties, but they are not contributing to them or making them worse.

Ms. Kellett asked if any members of the Public had questions for this witness, the following appeared:

Marie Mayer – 607 Hory Street – Asked about the arborvitaes and the deer population. Asked about the trash and about the lighting fixtures. Asked about the weeds in the sand and about pushing homes closer to the street.

Mr. Sciuolo stated there are other options, they will look into something that is deer resistant. There would be regular cans for the trash. Fixtures will be modern, but not shoe box lights. There would be lighting the parking area and walkways and it would be dark sky compliant. The height would be 12 feet. The design will drain so there is no standing water. Weeds would be pulled out, not using chemicals.

Mr. McKeon stated he would like to research it and get back to her about the homes being closer to the street.

Mr. Sciuolo stated the original plan did not have covered porches, now the plan has covered porches.

Anthony LaFerrara – 580 Ludlow Avenue – Asked where is all the water going to go.

Mr. Sciuolo stated the water ponds at the end of the street due to debris. The water on the site will fill up into the basin and then go out into the road.

Bobby Anstatt – 587 Ludlow Avenue – Asked about the test pits and about mosquitos in the basin.

Mr. Sciuolo stated ground water is at it highest in the winter. By complying with the 72 hours, there is no potential for mosquitos.

Mrs. Manchery – 577 Ludlow Avenue – Asked about water getting into her basement.

Mr. Sciuolo stated everything is flowing away from her house. Stated this development will not contribute to water getting into her basement.

Mr. Manchery – 577 Ludlow Avenue – Asked what is the impact of the basin behind his house.

Mr. Sciuolo stated the drainage basin will not go into his area. They are not impacting or improving his drainage issues.

Bobby Anstatt – 587 Ludlow Avenue – Asked about adding more water to the area and the impact to the flow.

Mr. Sciuillo stated they are not adding to it, they are reducing it. There will be less runoff from the site then there is there now.

Rita LaBrutto – 104 Arlington Road – Asked about 82 arborvitaes and working with the residents. Asked about deliveries and about the cost with COAH units. Asked about lights on timers.

Mr. Sciuillo – Said they will work with the Environmental Commission to discuss other options than the arborvitaes. The funding sources are always very low and the ground is usual always donated by the Township as part of their fair share obligation. The lights will shut off.

Mr. McKeon stated they do not have any deliveries other than maybe Amazon, there is no medical equipment delivered.

Therese Perez Ramos – 615 Hory Street – Asked about the homes having basements. Asked about impact to the neighborhood and about the lot not being developed. Asked about the trees already on the property and being maintained.

Mr. Sciuillo stated the homes will not have basements. The Township would be the one to contact to discuss the undeveloped lot. If a tree is in the footprint, it would be removed.

Finnegan Sezer – 8 Roger Avenue – Asked about raising the sidewalks. Asked about infrastructure for the crosswalk.

Mr. Sciuillo stated there will be ramps and will be accessible. Will discuss with the Board Engineer and the Police Department regarding the crosswalk.

Diane Price – 612 Hory Street – Asked who will be responsible if there is a water issue gets worse.

Mr. Sciuillo stated they will need to provide an “as built” survey and he is not sure who would be responsible.

Mr. McKeon stated that they would need to prove that the development is causing more problems. If it was proven, AVIDD would work with the neighbors to remediate it.

Mr. Manchery – 577 Ludlow Avenue – Asked who owns the property.

Mr. Tauriello stated he would need to go to the Township Committee.

Finnegan Sezer – 8 Roger Avenue – Asked about a walking area. Asked about bicycle parking for staff.

Mr. Sciuillo stated that is not part of the project.

Mr. McKeon stated they would provide a way to secure a bike if a staff member uses a bike to come to work. Most of the staff drive.

Bobby Anstatt – 587 Ludlow Avenue – Asked about the parking with the Christmas Tree Store.

Mr. McKeon stated he would need to find another place for the employees to park.

Ms. Kellett stated this hearing will be continued to June 21, 2023 and the applicant has agreed to extend the time of decision to June 30, 2023.

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn the meeting was regularly made seconded and passed. The meeting concluded at 11:40 p.m.

Molly Hurley Kellett, Chair