

CONDITIONAL USE HEARING
Council Chambers, City Hall, Franklin, PA
February 6, 2023

Members Present: Douglas Baker, Mayor
Donna Fletcher, Deputy Mayor
James Johnson
Todd Zahner
Ryan Rudegeair
Samuel Lyons
Christian Marshall

Members Excused: None

In Attendance: Tracy Jamieson, City Manager
Brian Spaid, Esq., City Solicitor
Charles Gibbons, Code Enforcement Officer
Harmony Motter, Finance Director
James Wetzel, Fire Chief
T.J. Parks, Recording Secretary
Alex Spaid, Dale, Woodard, Gent, McFate
Amie Wood-Wessell, Venango Co. Human Services
Mike Dulaney, Venango Co. Commissioner
Deb Eckelberger, FICDA
Jake and Ashley Smith, 1346 Elk Street
Helen Fielding, The Derrick
Matt Beith, 324 16th Street
Aaron Campbell, FPD

Mayor Baker called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M. and introduced Mr. Spaid, the City Solicitor, as legal counsel, who swore in witnesses that wished to speak on the matter of the conditional use request of Venango County Human Services, applicants for the conditional use. Mayor Baker then handed the floor to Mr. Gibbons, Code Enforcement Officer, to present the City's case and submit the evidence. Mr. Gibbons described the location of the property as Parcel #10,334.-019, situated at 701 Grant Street, zoned C-1 Commercial District, and introduced the application for a zoning hearing, dated December 28, 2022 as Exhibit One. Mr. Gibbons explained that the property is owned by Taylor Landholdings, LLC and is proposed to be used as a "congregate residence" that would be operated by Venango County Human Services. He then submitted, as Exhibit Two, the specific portion of the Zoning Ordinance, which indicates that such use is permitted as a Conditional Use.

Mr. Gibbons continued by reporting that a notification letter of the date and time for the Hearing was mailed to the applicant and the Venango County Planning Commission, and distributed to the City Manager's Office and the City Solicitor. He presented this letter as Exhibit Three. The postcards that were sent to adjacent property owners and the mailing list were entered in as Exhibits Four and Five, respectively. He presented the required Conditional Use Hearing legal notice that was published twice in the newspaper as Exhibit Six. Lastly, Exhibit Seven, the notice posted on the northerly and easterly right-of-way lines of the property, was entered into evidence.

Conditional Use Hearing

February 6, 2023

After giving his testimony, Mr. Marshall asked Mr. Gibbons how many post cards were mailed. Mr. Gibbons responded that twenty-five (25) post cards were sent out to neighboring property owners. Mrs. Fletcher then asked for a copy of the list of recipients and noticed that one of the recipients on the list is deceased. Mr. Gibbons responded that he is required to send the notices to persons listed as the property owners; if a postcard was not returned to him from the Post Office, he assumes someone received it. There were no further questions for Mr. Gibbons at this time.

Amie Wood-Wessell, of Venango County Human Services, testified that the Human Services department has been renting the facility from Taylor Landholdings, LLC to use as a transitional care facility as residents strive to find permanent housing. The facility has four (4) bedrooms with two (2) beds each, and four (4) office spaces for housing managers that will work with tenants to find housing. The County plans to also use the site to create a Social Determinants of Health distribution center, where families and individuals could get food, personal hygiene items, etc. as funding allows. Ms. Wood-Wessell stated that this location was chosen because research described the neighborhood as an area of significant need. At this conclusion of testimony, Mayor Baker opened the floor for questions.

Mrs. Fletcher asked if any complaints have been filed. Ms. Wood-Wessell said she is not aware of any issues. Lieutenant Campbell of the Franklin Police Department confirmed that there have been no incidents since the County's overtaking of the facility. He reported on six (6) occurrences between May 2019 and May 2020, for medical calls, suspicious person, or request for K-9 presence.

Mr. Rudegeair asked how long they've been renting the space and if there are currently any residents there. Ms. Wood-Wessell answered that Human Services entered into a 5-year lease at the beginning of December and have currently been using it as an office space with no residents at the moment, but have had two (2) tenants prior to the hearing reside there as part of the Bridgehouse Program. Mr. Lyons confirmed that residents had been staying there at one time, as he noticed activity during his work hours at the neighboring Franklin Bronze.

Mr. Zahner inquired as what would be the types of circumstances that the prospective residents would come from. Ms. Wood-Wessell said that it could be anything from mental illness to drug abuse or just going through a rough patch, but the focus is on those that are homeless and in need. Mr. Marshall then asked if the residents are required to receive case management services through the County in order to be eligible for housing, and if criminal background checks are conducted prior to admittance. Both questions were answered affirmatively, adding that having case managers on site during traditional business hours provides convenience for residents, and that a history of serious crimes, such as murder, rape, abuse, makes a person ineligible to stay there. She continued to state that the facility would house adults only, both men and women.

Conditional Use Hearing

February 6, 2023

Commissioner Mike Dulaney stated that the County hopes that adding this facility in this location will eliminate the need for the facility on Liberty Street. Mr. Spaid confirmed that there is off street parking, both in the front of the building and in the back and that the residents would have access to the building 24/7.

There being no further comments or questions, the hearing adjourned at 6:52 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T.J. Parks", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

T.J. Parks,
Recording Secretary