

**NORTH EAST PLANNING COMMISSION**  
106 South Main Street, North East, Maryland 21901  
Tuesday, August 8, 2023  
7:00 P.M.

Chairman Mark Dobbins called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Present included Commissioner Hilary Crothers and member Judy Duffy. Also present were Melissa Cook-Mackenzie, Town Administrator, Betsy Vennell, Director of Planning, and Lisa Rhoades, Planning and Zoning Assistant. Calvin Wilson was absent from the meeting.

**-MINUTES-**

July 11, 2023

Ms. Duffy made a motion to approve the July 11, 2023 Planning Commission minutes, as presented. Commissioner Crothers seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

**-OLD BUSINESS-**

None.

**-NEW BUSINESS-**

1. Case A-2023-05-SE: Special Exception application from Stephanie Carducci of Bee My Voice and Amy Ocasio of Live for Thomas Foundation. Applicants propose to provide Peer to Peer support, Suicide “Postvention” and Youth Mental Health First Aid services at 22 North Main Street, North East, Maryland 21901. Also found on Tax Map 031B; Parcel 0088. Property owner: Dominick DiPatre, 359 Old Chestnut Road, Elkton, Maryland. Zoning District “VC” Village Commercial. The North East Planning Commission will hear this Case to form a recommendation to the Board of Appeals who will hear this Case August 24, 2023.

Ms. Amy Ocasio, 280 West Claiborne Road, North East and Stephanie Carducci, 2027 Hopewell Road, Port Deposit presented their Special Exception application to the Planning Commission. Both applicants wanted their application to be part of the record.

Ms. Ocasio the co-founder of the Live for Thomas Foundation reported she is a licensed clinical professional counselor and has a doctorate in prevention science with a focus on suicide prevention. Ms. Ocasio stated that her son Thomas died at 16 years old in 2019 from suicide. Ms. Ocasio stated that Thomas did not display suicidal tendencies. He was an athlete and honor student and was on track to graduate early. After Thomas’ death, the Live for Thomas Foundation was created. Through talking with others it was determined that there are not many services in Cecil County for teens and there is still a stigma around speaking about mental illness and mental health openly. Ms. Ocasio said that she and Ms. Carducci met at Thomas’ funeral, became friends and then soon after realized that their two foundations, while having different areas of focus, share the same goal. Therefore, they have decided to become partners and would like to open a business jointly at 22 North Main Street. The Live for Thomas portion of the

APPROVED

October 3, 2023

business will provide youth mental health first aid training for adults 18 and older who will work with children 12 to 18 years of age. Both Bee My Voice and the Live for Thomas Foundation will be providing support groups and peer support. There are support groups currently in existence that anyone can attend, however, specific support groups such as a parent group, family member group or loss of a friend group are not available. Ms. Ocasio stated that it is often difficult for someone who has lost a son to relate in the same way to someone who has lost a friend. Ms. Ocasio stated that a lot of children in the North East community have been impacted by the death of a friend, parent or family member and there is nowhere for teens to go and grieve with others experiencing the same type of loss. The support groups will give teens a space to talk to others experiencing similar loss or challenges, providing someone available to listen to personal struggles when needed and a safe place for them to speak openly. Ms. Ocasio commented that suicide is often an impulse reaction to a situation.

The location they have chosen was specifically chosen due to its proximity to the North East Middle and High School. Ms. Carducci explained that Be My Voice focuses on the other side to suicide which is postvention. Ms. Carducci stated that in 2018 their family lost a son, Daniel, to suicide and he also was someone who no one would have expected to have committed suicide. Ms. Carducci stated that at the scene of a suicide there is a lot of components going on at the same time such as emergency response personnel, a funeral home representative, police personnel among others, in addition to several decisions needing to be made. Bee My Voice will train volunteers who have also experienced a suicide loss to go to the scene with a comfort bag and a pamphlet with different resources within the county. This process was developed by Dr. Frank Campbell in New Orleans who is the founder of LOSS (Local Outreach Suicide Survivors). Ms. Carducci reported that Cecil County averages about 12-14 suicides a year and that for each suicide there are 135 people left behind to deal with the loss. Ms. Carducci stated that people often do not know what to say to a parent who have lost a child. They would like to help the public with how to have conversations about a difficult topic such as suicide. In addition, peer support would not start until volunteers have been adequately trained. Ms. Carducci and Ms. Ocasio commented that some of their services are based off of Sean's House located in Delaware and they also will be applying for the necessary insurance. Ms. Ocasio mentioned that the new name of their business will be "Den 22". Ms. Carducci also stated that they would like to amend their application to state that they will be open 7 days a week. They would like to have hours for children after school.

Ms. Duffy inquired if there will be staff onsite. Ms. Ocasio stated that there will always be a trained support person on staff during business hours. Ms. Ocasio also described how the rented space will be divided into 3 spaces. Ms. Ocasio reported that there is parking available to the rear of the building. Ms. Ocasio stated that all of the employees are on a volunteer basis. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie reported the Planning Office received three letters of support for the business. Ms. Cook-Mackenzie stated she would like to meet with both Ms. Ocasio and Ms. Carducci and the North East Chief of Police to see how they can work together when faced with these situations. Ms. Cook-Mackenzie stated that she is in support of this business and added that there is a need for this business within Cecil County.

Chairman Dobbins inquired if anyone from the public would like to speak, however, there were no comments.

Mrs. Vennell reported that three letters of support were received and briefly commented on the letters from Jesse Fairchild, Denise Hill and Becky Murray.

Ms. Duffy made a recommendation for the proposed use to provide peer to peer support, suicide “postvention” and youth mental health first aid services at 22 North Main Street, North East to the Board of Appeals. Commissioner Crothers second the motion and the motion was approved by all.

2. Turner Park: Proposed Reconstruction of the Turner Park ball field, addition of pickle ball courts, soccer fields and a dog park.

Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that Turner Park was made up of three parcels. Two of the parcels were acquired in the 1950’s and the third was acquired 2010. There were several proposed uses in the past, however, they never came to fruition.

The park currently consists of a softball field, an old basketball court and tennis courts. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie reported that the Town met with a consultant on a new design for the park. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that there had been several requests for pickleball courts and they have proposed enough courts for tournaments.

The proposal for Turner Park also includes, a dog park, micro soccer field and a baseball diamond, fencing and port-o-pots. . The projects estimated cost is 2.7 million dollars and therefore phasing the project may be suggested. Chairman Dobbins stated pickleball can be loud and makes a distinctive sound as the ball is hit back and forth, and expressed concern about how the neighbors will feel about the noise and suggested flipping the proposed layout due to the sound from pickleball court. Mrs. Cook-Mackenzie stated that the proposed layout being shown this evening was created for the purpose of applying for grant funding. Ms. Duffy confirmed that there will be water available at the park for the dog park. Commissioner Crothers stated that she is excited to see a dog park proposed and stated there is a need for one in Town. Ms. Duffy commented that Hudson River Park in New York has a nice dog park. Mrs. Vennell also commented that the Ridgely Forest Development installed a dog park within their community.

#### **-MISCELLANEOUS-**

None.

#### **-REPORTS-**

Mrs. Vennell reported that the proposed amendments to the North East Zoning Ordinance will be added to a future agenda. Mrs. Vennell reported that several Town employees as well as the Mayor will be attending a Symposium in Annapolis which may offer some information on cannabis dispensaries.

#### **-COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC-**

There were no comments from the public.

APPROVED

October 3, 2023

Planning Commission Meeting Minutes  
August 8, 2023

**-NEXT MEETING-**

The next Planning Commission meeting has been scheduled for September 5, 2023. Mrs. Vennell reported that the North East Fire Company and North East United Methodist Episcopal Church are currently on the agenda.

**-ADJOURNMENT-**

With no further business, Ms. Duffy made a motion to adjourn at 8:03 p.m. Commissioner Crothers seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Respectfully submitted:

Attest:

Lisa Rhoades  
Planning and Zoning Assistant

Mark Dobbins  
Chairman

APPROVED  
October 3, 2023