

NORTH EAST BOARD OF APPEALS
North East Town Hall / 106 South Main Street
Thursday, December 7, 2023
7:00 p.m.

Chairman Maurice Tenney called the meeting to order at 7:02 P.M. Present for the meeting included members S.J. Anderson and Martha Kline who attended via Zoom. Also in attendance were Betsy Vennell, Director of Planning, David Beste, Town Attorney and Lisa Rhoades, Planning and Zoning Assistant. Melissa Cook-Mackenzie, Zoning Administrator was absent from the meeting.

-MINUTES-

August 24, 2023

Ms. Anderson made a motion to approve the August 24, 2023 meeting minutes. Mrs. Kline seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

-PUBLIC HEARING-

Chairman Tenney opened the public hearing at 7:02 p.m.

Case A-2023-07-SE

Mrs. Vennell read the case into the record Case-A-2023-07-SE.

Case A-2023-07-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 on the lower level 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 Court Reporter, Kelly Taylor, attending via Zoom, swore in the applicants, Stephanie Carducci of Bee My Voice and Amy Ocasio of Live for Thomas Foundation both of 22 North Main Street, North East, Maryland.

Chairman Tenney inquired if any of the Board members need to recuse themselves from voting on the special exception. The Board members responded no.

Chairman Tenney inquired if the applicants would like their application to be part of the record. Ms. Carducci and Ms. Ocasio both replied yes.

Ms. Ocasio reported that she had come before the North East Board of Appeals previously on August 24, 2023 to request approval, to provide Peer to Peer support, Suicide “Postvention” and Youth Mental Health First Aid services in the upper floor of 22 North Main Street and they were granted conditional approval. Ms. Ocasio stated this evening she and Ms. Carducci would like to extend the previously approved use to the lower level at 22 North Main Street. Ms. Ocasio stated that during the August hearing, she and Ms. Carducci commented that if the lower level were to become available for rent, they would be interested in extending their use to the lower level. Ms.

Ocasio reported that shortly after the August hearing, the lower level space in their building became available. Therefore, this evening Ms. Ocasio came to request approval to extend the use to the lower level. Ms. Ocasio stated that they would like to use the lower level for adolescents to give them a safe place to decompress. The lower level has a separate entrance and restroom. Ms. Ocasio added that this is not in any way a place for teens to “hang-out” and it is not a teen club. This area will always have a trained adult present and a trained peer for support. There will be organized support groups held on the first floor for the adults and on the lower level for adolescents. The space is designed to be a comfortable, safe space. Ms. Ocasio described the lower level as having a lounge area, game area for board games, and possibly a foosball table, and an arts and craft area. Ms. Ocasio stated there will be no drugs or prescriptions dispensed from this business.

Mr. Tenney inquired if any food would be served, what supervision is planned and the approximate number of children expected onsite at one time? Ms. Ocasio replied that there will be snacks available but no meals unless they are holding a scheduled cooking workshop. Ms. Ocasio also stated that they are expecting approximately no more than 10 children at a time. There will be adult supervision based on the number of children and the need. Ms. Ocasio added that she and Ms. Carducci will always be on hand should additional support be required.

Ms. Anderson inquired how the children would enter the lower level entrance and how would this entrance be secured. Ms. Ocasio replied that during regular business hours, during the day light hours, the door will be open. However, after it becomes dark, the door will be locked and they will be using a ring doorbell camera for that entrance.

Ms. Ocasio stated that some members of the public, including the tenant from the adjacent business, came to the Planning Commission meeting held December 5, 2023 at the Town Hall. Ms. Ocasio stated that they had asked a few questions and seemed to feel comfortable with the businesses purpose.

Mrs. Kline commented that she believes this is a good use of this building and the Board concurred.

Mr. Tenney closed the public hearing at 7:12 P.M.

Mrs. Vennell reported that pursuant to Special Exception requirements, the applicants attended the Planning Commission meeting on December 5, 2023. Mrs. Vennell also reported that there is another tenant in the building, at 22 North Main Street, who attended the Planning Commission meeting, along with other members of the public. The public comments were in relation to the possibility of teenagers “hanging out”. After some open dialogue at the meeting between the applicants, the tenants in the building, other members of the public, and the Planning Commission, those who were present were satisfied and expressed that they were supportive of this use.

Mrs. Vennell reported that the Planning Commission forwarded a recommendation for approval of the application to the Board of Appeals. The recommendation did not contain any conditions.

Chairman Tenney inquired if the Board of Appeal members, Town Staff or Town Attorney had any final comments. There were none.

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Approved March 28, 2024

Chairman Tenney stated if all board members are in favor of approval please say "I". The motion to approve the Special Exception was approved by all members present.

Ms. Ocasio inquired about permitting for the newly approved space for their business. Mrs. Vennell stated that the Planning Office will create an amendment to the original permit.

Ms. Ocasio reported that they have contacted the North East Chamber of Commerce in regards to a ribbon cutting which will probably occur in April and it will be at least March or April before they will have the downstairs prepared to be open to the public.

-OLD BUSINESS-

None.

-REPORTS-

None.

-MISCELLANEOUS-

None.

-NEXT MEETING-

The next Board of Appeals is scheduled for January 25, 2024.

-ADJOURNMENT-

Ms. Anderson made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:22 P.M. Mrs. Kline seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Lisa Rhoades
Planning and Zoning Assistant

Maurice H. Tenney, Jr.
Chairman