

North East Planning Commission
April 1, 2025

NORTH EAST PLANNING COMMISSION
North East Town Hall Meeting Room
106 South Main Street, North East, Maryland 21901
Wednesday, April 1, 2025
7:00 P.M.

Chairman Dobbins called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Present for the meeting included Commissioner Crothers-Moore, Members Judy Duffy, and Calvin Wilson. Also present included Betsy Vennell, Director of Planning and Lisa Rhoades, Planning and Zoning Assistant. Melissa B. Cook-MacKenzie, Zoning Administrator was absent from the meeting.

-MINUTES-

February 4, 2025

Ms. Duffy made a motion to approve the February 4, 2025 Planning Commission meeting minutes and Ms. Crothers-Moore seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

-OLD BUSINESS-

None.

-NEW BUSINESS-

Case-A-2025-01-SE: Special Exception application from Amy Ocasio of Live for Thomas Foundation. Applicant propose to expand their existing use to the adjoining suites and attic area to provide Peer to Peer support, Suicide Prevention/Postvention support, Interim Counseling Services, Youth Mental Health First Aid and Wellness services at 22 North Main Street, North East, Maryland 21901. 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 April 24, 2025.

-PUBLIC HEARING-

Chairman Dobbins opened the Public Hearing at 7:01 P.M.

Case-A-2025-01-SE

Chairman Dobbins stated that the purpose of this evening's public hearing is to hear the Special Exception Case A-2025-01-SE and to make a recommendation to the North East Board of Appeals, who will hear the Case on April 24, 2025.

Dr. Amy Ocasio, 22 North Main Street stated that she is the co-founder and President of the Live for Thomas Foundation which was established in memory of her son Thomas who died in 2018 by suicide. The business is focused on the adolescent and young adult population focusing on suicide awareness and prevention. Dr. Ocasio reported that they currently rent half of the building at 22 North Main Street. This includes half of the first floor, which is used for a reception area, conference room and office space, and the basement area which is used for "Den 22", an area for youth to have a safe space, decompress, relax, peer to peer support, art space and

an office. Den 22 opened in August 2024 and since its opening they have had 463 guests and have had 15 crisis interventions. This evening Dr. Ocasio is asking to expand her business into the space previous occupied by a hair salon including the attic space as the foundation is growing. Dr. Ocasio stated that the goal is to provide interim counseling to offer services to individuals while they are on a waiting list to enter a therapy program. For the attic space they would like to provide an open space floorplan for yoga and meditation. Dr. Ocasio stated that counseling will be done through her existing counseling service and LLC and any other counselors onsite will be under her LLC, as well.

Chairman Dobbins stated that the Planning Commission is very pleased with the foundations progress thus far. Chairman Dobbins inquired if the Planning Office has received any comments from the public and Mrs. Vennell replied no.

Ms. Vennell inquired if Dr. Ocasio is interested in expanding the current hours of operation and if any drugs would be stored or distributed in conjunction with this proposed expansion. Dr. Ocasio replied no drugs would be stored or distributed and she would be interested in expanding the hours.

Dr. Ocasio reported that the currently hours for Den 22 are 3 P.M.-10 P.M. Monday - Friday, Saturday and Sunday 10 A.M. – 10 P.M., there will be different hours for the summer as they will follow the Cecil County Public Schools, offering longer hours in the summer, open 7 days a week. Dr. Ocasio reported that when individuals come in, they enter through the reception area where they are required to scan a QR code for demographic information and in addition there are some questions to gather additional information about hours and services. Dr. Ocasio stated that 76% of individuals state that they would like extended hours as it is the later evening hours when they are thinking and struggling often times getting overwhelmed. Therefore, they would like to extend the hours to 12 midnight at this time and re-visit the extended hours in a year. Dr. Ocasio stated that if the extended hours are approved they would not officially extend the hours until they had enough trained staff to accommodate the new hours.

Mrs. Vennell stated that this foundation has had a good impact to the community. Dr. Ocasio said they are mindful that there are residents adjacent to their location and they do not allow students to linger outside. Students are only outside if there are organized activities run by staff. In addition, Dr. Ocasio reported that she has asked the property owner about installing security cameras so that staff can continually monitor the property. Dr. Ocasio reported that they have not had any issues and keep in good contact with the neighboring properties.

Ms. Duffy inquired how many children Dr. Ocasio expects during the extended evening hours. Dr. Ocasio stated that she would expect approximately 3 or more each day of the weekend Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings as it is the evening time when they are alone and their minds start reeling. Dr. Ocasio stated because this happens late at night this would give them a safe space and someone to talk to if needed. Chairman Dobbins commented that he would want this foundation open when needed.

Mr. Wilson inquired if there was a limit to how many individuals are permitted in the attic space. Dr. Ocasio stated the Fire Marshall will be inspecting the areas and if there are any restrictions at all, those items will be adhered to.

Chairman Dobbins inquired if there were any further comments and there were none.
Chairman Dobbins closed the public hearing at 7:18 P.M.

Ms. Duffy made a motion to recommend approval of Case: A-2025-01-SE to the Board of Appeals, subject to the following conditions:

Conditions:

1. No drugs shall be stored or dispensed from the premises
2. The applicant shall close no later than midnight each day. The applicant shall return to the Planning Commission and Board of Appeals in one year to review whether the midnight closing time has caused any disturbances in the neighborhood. During this review, the applicant may also request extended hours of operation."

Mr. Wilson seconded the motion, and the motion was approved by all.

-REPORTS-

Workshop - Route 272 Corridor Plan

Mrs. Vennell reported that an invitation has been distributed to the Planning Commission for the Workshop for the Route 272 Plan being held at the North East Fire Hall, the goal is to adopt the plan into the Comprehensive Plan, so that if grant funding becomes available it can be noted that not only is the item on the Annual Transportation List, it is also part of the Towns Comprehensive Plan. Chairman Dobbins inquired if the entire length of Route 272 is being addressed. Mrs. Vennell replied, this study will only include Route 274 to Shady Beach Road.

Comprehensive Plan

Mrs. Vennell reported some of the transportation maps are still being revised. The Land Use Map amendments and Chapter 2, 4 and 3 are almost complete. Mrs. Vennell reported that she is working, with the consultant, on the Comprehensive Plan revised schedule and adoption date.

Riverwoods at North East Phase 2

Mrs. Vennell reported that the Planning Office had received an application for Riverwoods at North East Phase 2 Preliminary Plan review, however, the agency comments will not be received in time for the May 6th Planning Commission meeting.

North East Preserve

Mrs. Vennell reported that the Town applied for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Grant (\$68,000) which could be used for the disposing of tires and other junk and debris, however, it has not been approved yet. Mrs. Vennell also commented that there are several other grants for the Preserve which will be applied for, as well.

Casa Mezcal at North East

Mrs. Rhoades reported that the new restaurant received Town Approval. The Cecil County Liquor Board granted the transfer of the Liquor License and they have passed the Health Department approvals. The owner has informed the Planning Office that they expect to be open by the end of the month.

Dollar General

Mrs. Vennell reported that the Dollar General has closed permanently and that the owner, Don Horton, will either sell or rent the building.

Project Clean Stream

Mrs. Vennell reported that Project Clean Stream will take place this Saturday, April 5, 2025. Ms. Duffy stated that they have approximately 7-8 volunteers.

-MISCELLANEOUS-

Chesapeake Club

Ms. Duffy inquired about the status of the Chesapeake Club Apartment project. Mrs. Vennell reported that the project had been divided into apartments and single family homes. There were two Traffic Impact Studies done, however, the County only wanted one Traffic Impact Study, to contain and combine all the traffic impacts.

Ridgely Forest

Chairman Dobbins inquired if Ridgely Forest is fully built out. Mrs. Vennell replied yes, the Town has released all of the occupancy permits. The Town has been receiving quite a few inquiries about street lighting and other items. Mrs. Vennell reported that the Planning Office had a meeting with the property management company, Aspen Property Management to discuss permits, the Ridgely Forest Master Planned Community Guidelines and resident and Homeowner Association (HOA) inquiries. Chairman Dobbins inquired how many members are on the Ridgely Forest HOA Board. Mr. Wilson replied 4 or 5.

Planning Commission Meeting Time

Ms. Duffy inquired if the other members may consider meeting at an earlier time. Mr. Wilson replied that unfortunately he is usually coming from Washington DC and would not be able to meet any earlier than 7 P.M.

-NEXT MEETING-

The next Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for May 6, 2025.

-ADJOURNMENT-

With no further business, Ms. Duffy made a motion to adjourn at 7:44 P.M. Commissioner Crothers-Moore seconded the motion and the motion was approved by all.

Respectfully Submitted:

Attest:

Lisa Rhoades, Planning and Zoning Assistant

Mark Dobbins, Chairman