

MINUTES  
City of Alpena Planning Commission  
Special Meeting (Council Chambers and Virtual)  
November 27, 2023 Alpena, Michigan

CALL TO ORDER:

The regular meeting of the Planning Commission was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Randy Boboltz, Planning Commission Chairman.

ROLL CALL: PLANNING COMMISSION

PRESENT: Peterson, Boboltz, Gilmore, Moses, Kostelic, Sundin, Wojda, Kemp

ABSENT: VanWagoner

STAFF: Montiel Birmingham (Planning, Development, and Zoning Director), Kathleen Sauve (Recording Secretary)

OTHERS PRESENT: Approximate count of 22 citizens in attendance.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: Agenda was approved as printed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Meeting November 9, 2023, minutes were approved as printed.  
Meeting November 13, 2023, minutes were approved as printed.

Boboltz explained the order of procedures for the public hearing.

Speaking out of order, Carl Silver, owner of 306 Lockwood Street, and Angie Skiba, owner of 635 River Street, stated that they did not receive notice of the meeting; Silver requested that the meeting be adjourned. Birmingham confirmed that all property owners within 300 feet of the subject property were sent notices of the special meeting; there is a record if any are returned, and she would confirm. Boboltz requested that Silver desist and instructed Birmingham to proceed with her Staff Report.

**PUBLIC HEARING AND COMMISSION ACTION: Case # SU-23-05 – Special Land Use Request – Center of Charity Warming Shelter, 324 W. Chisholm Street** – Applicant and Owner request to allow an emergency warming shelter within the St. Bernard’s Church property’s Center of Charity. The location of the shelter would be in the former school building where other

community services are currently taking place, specifically St. Bernard's Catholic Church, Madonna House Ministry, Friendship Room, Baby Pantry, and Children's Closet.

Birmingham presented the Finding of Fact report (see Appendix A), Special Land Use Standards (see Appendix C), and Supplemental Regulations Section 7.27 (see Appendix D).

**FAVOR:** Father Tyler Bishoff, Pastor at All Saints Parish, spoke in favor of the proposal and gave some history on the building. He explained that the City approached him about the issue of homelessness, the Parish saw this as part of their ten-year Strategic Plan; they saw the Emergency Warming Shelter as the Friendship Room expanding for a few more hours of operation. He said that they are open to considering just daytime use at this point, with the option of overnight only in emergency situations due to outdoor temperature. They were able to hire a director and the Michigan Health Endowment fund gave them two years of funding to help get them started.

Christina Kihn, director of the Emergency Warming Shelter at the Center of Charity, shared a speech she prepared which included information about homelessness, statistics on the topic, and why this proposal is so important to them. She then shared proposed floor plans room by room, the entryway from Fifth Avenue, procedures once they enter, and exit routes.

Larry LaCross, Clinical Supervisor for Catholic Human Services, spoke in favor of the project and commended City leadership for helping to come up with this plan. He explained how people living unsheltered is a rapidly growing problem in the area, the partnerships that [CMH] has with other agencies in the area and how they encounter [homeless people] in all different settings. He also explained some situations in which people can become homeless, how the other shelters in the area have a different purpose, and why this is a good location for this proposed emergency shelter. He spoke about safety and that it is an understandable concern however, having the services to bring people in off the street and giving them access to greater case management services, substance abuse and mental health treatment and a pathway to get housing would hopefully result in a safer neighborhood.

Mike Erickson, President of the Northern Region of MyMichigan Health, stated that he was the individual who made the initial phone call to the City about the problem they were having at the hospital with homeless people seeking shelter in the Emergency Department when it was sub-zero temperatures outside. He explained that [the Emergency Department] is just not the location for folks to be for an extended period of time, other than for medical treatment, for a number of reasons. He said that personally and on behalf of the hospital, they are in favor of this as it is an alternative to being in the ED, freezing to death on the streets or getting freezing injuries and showing up in the ED because of not having other options.

Eric Hamp, City of Alpena Police Chief, gave a perspective from a law enforcement point of view and explained that he was involved in the initial group that started looking at this issue. He said

that they deal with this on a daily if not weekly basis. He spoke about the other wonderful agencies that are in the area and some of the obstacles that they face with each. He said vouchers used to be available to give to people but there is a shortage of hotels in the area as it is and they don't want to take [homeless individuals] anymore as they tend to carry a lot of baggage with them, being at the lowest point in their lives and having been being burned in the past on incidences; also, funds are limited and it is expensive. He explained that this is more of a resource center for people who are in need of so many services, but currently the services are spread all over and people have no way to get to some of them; this would provide them all in one place. Individuals have been found numerous times sleeping in the front entrance of the Public Safety building because there is a heater in that area; they have even offered it at times. Individuals are sometimes found going from business to business just to find someplace warm which becomes a burden on the business owners, and eventually [the police] get called. He explained that this shelter is meant to treat people who live in Alpena, not people from all over the State; it is not meant to be a long-term residence, but only for emergencies.

Bill Morford, President of the Society of St. Vincent De Paul, explained that [St. Vincent De Paul] is a last resort; when other agencies can not help, they can come in with some money to help. He said that he looks forward to having all the services together for them to get away from homelessness and it would be safer having them in a supervised structured place than walking on the streets.

OPPOSITION: Patrick Heraghty, lives directly adjacent to the Church and the proposed shelter representing himself and many of his neighbors, said that he was there because this would be the third proposed shelter in his backyard. His concerns were as follows:

- it feels rushed and lacks neighborhood and community engagement that is critical to ensure equity
- project packets and details were not available in a timely fashion
- important information was not included in the packet such as a copy of the Warming Shelter's guidelines and procedures
- no licensing and inexperienced leadership
- lacks funding
- concessions being requested for phase 2
- no barriers to entrance
- economic impact on the neighborhood
- lack of community outreach, involvement, and engagement involved in this project
- who received the notices
- he lives across the street with no outreach to his household from the Church
- no documentation required, only for adults and Alpena residents, difficult to ensure due to no barrier to entrance

- Shelter would not be open during the Baby Pantry's hours for safety of the mothers and children – there are many young moms with children around the corner – he asked the Planning Commission to consider for Compatibility of Use
- Christine has no experience leading a shelter, unsure if she has experience leading volunteers
- The Church's current year budget is running at a deficit
- Volunteer staff training is only four hours
- Meetings were not conducted earlier
- Planning Commission should set occupancy limits, not City Officials or another Agency
- Buffer Zones are placed so as not to concentrate a problem or potential problem in one neighborhood
- Inconsistencies with the Comprehensive Plan

Doretta DeCaire, neighboring resident, said she was concerned that the project is moving too fast, the person put in charge has had no experience dealing with homeless people, and the surrounding home's values would be decreased. She also did not think that any of the community partners that would be helping with the Shelter attended the meeting.

Angie Skiba, local citizen, said she is adamantly opposed for the same reasons she fought the services that were going into the Sunrise Mission for years, because of reasons that have happened to her personally. Other concerns she shared:

- She was told that people could be coming from as far as Harrisville
- Who is paying for the shelter – did the grant monies go toward the new roof that was put on St. Bernard's church?
- Lack of vetting of people being brought into the neighborhood
- Amnesty lockers will not ensure safety for the neighborhood
- Not sufficient enough training
- Phase 2 should be out of the question
- Who will control and police the maximum number of people allowed at the shelter
- Does not want negativity brought into her neighborhood
- Lack of transparency, rushing everything

Wayne Carr, lifelong resident, said that you can't help a person that doesn't want to help themselves and this would enable them to continue their lifestyle. He said years ago, the same issue was brought up at the old Bingham School and it was voted down. He said that it is the Zoning Board's responsibility to watch out for the residents of Alpena to monitor and make sure lifestyles are not endangered by somebody else.

Wayne Riggs, local resident, said he would like to know how many people have frozen to death in Alpena and is everybody really crying over something that hasn't really happened. He said

that you can make life pretty rosy for people that just don't have the desire to do anything because it will be done for them; until bodies are found on the street frozen to death, there is not a problem, just people that are cold.

Carl Silver, owner of a neighboring property, asked if the proposed use of the property would consist of all the buildings on the property. He stated that he did not receive notice of the meeting in the mail and felt that the meeting should be adjourned as others had not received notice either. He said he would be interested to find out what percent of these people really are homeless by choice; the "no questions asked" policy and not asking for quick identification does not make sense to him. He said that something so loosely operated is born to fail; it is not just for Alpena people, it is for "people" and asked them not to misrepresent what will actually happen. He went on to say that it is a burden for people that own property around there; the lack of transparency is disgusting.

Angie Skiba mirrored Silver's sentiments, and said she feels the people need to be identified and vetted if they are going to be there.

QUESTION FORUM: Gerry Marvis (sp?), an Alpena Township resident, said that she is in favor of the warming center and commended everyone for the work that they have put into it so far, but asked for more statistics to help her identify and clarify the need for the shelter. Victoria Purvis, Homeless and Prevention Manager at Northeast Michigan Community Service Agency (largest community action service agency in the State of Michigan), said that at the end of last Wednesday, they had 168 households on the street and 97 children; the average age of a homeless child is eight. Those children could go to the shelter with their parents to get their homework done during school breaks.

Pat Decaire said that they were told Phase 1 is only for 18 and older, so how do you place a child with them if it is a married couple. Father Tyler said that [Purvis] was making an example of statistics, not a policy of the shelter. Purvis said that she is not affiliated with the Catholic Church, she was speaking as the action agency, and she was letting them know the population of homelessness in our area and what services need to be provided for them; something like the warming shelter can help those individuals.

Decaire said that their area is flooded with people walking down the streets and alleyways, from one place to another going to the Soup Kitchen, and the biggest problem he has is that they will need to know who the people are going into the shelter and what they have in their bags for the safety of the area.

Father Tyler Bishoff said he wanted to summarize a lot of the questions he heard and apply some facts. He said the new roof that went on the building was a separate amount of funding that came in from Parishioners; no grant funding was applied to that; it was all donations. The grant from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund was for \$140,000 over two years; in the

grant, it was for the programming of a possible launching of an Emergency Shelter. The grant givers were made very clear of the Zoning and Planning Commission hurdles and that was written into it. They were granted the grant, even with the possibility of it not going through. He said as far a timeline, they are in no rush; the reason why they talked about Phase 1 and Phase 2, was to create transparency so that nobody would feel fooled down the road when they mentioned the possibility of Phase 2. He asked the Planning Commission to distinguish in their motions between the two Phases – Phase 1 daytime shelter and Phase 2 overnight shelter - because it was their understanding that even to have anyone to come in the doors for a warming shelter, they knew they needed permission to do so. He told the public in attendance and the Commission that he would be happy to distribute the Operations and Procedures manual to anyone who requested them. He said [the Church] is not feeling the pressure or emergency, that is coming to them from all the different agencies around, including the police and hospital. They didn't have the meeting in August because the grant was not contingent on the Planning Commission approving it; the grant recognized that it was part of the process, they wanted to get some of their ducks in a row and will be happy to answer more questions more adequately over time.

Doretta DeCaire asked Father Tyler why St. Mary's Convent has not been considered for the shelter. He said that there are multiple things that are possible; All Saints owns huge swaths of property in Alpena (185,000 square feet of buildings across five different campuses in the City), but that is not part of their Strategic Plan or Ten-Year Strategic Plan right now.

Sundin suggested having a meeting which would involve the Planning Commission and ZBA, to get questions answered instead of making a decision that day; that they could end up being there very late getting questions answered and it would be hard to effectively condense all the information into a motion.

Boboltz closed the public hearing at 7:48 pm for deliberations.

Sundin asked why there was nothing happening sooner, given that they knew about it for many months. Birmingham said that the information about the Planning Commission and the Zoning Board of Appeals requirements was shared in February, they did not have a Director at that time and that was likely the reason it took time; the applicant can choose to request a Special Meeting if they wish. She said she was able to put what she needed to pull together in time to accommodate that; all of the standard timelines were met just like for any other meeting. Father Tyler Bishoff said that they were trying not to rush, they waited until the grant was finalized and received a Director to begin the process; although the meeting was for an Emergency Shelter, it shouldn't feel like an emergency. He said that they want it to be a process that plays out properly and this is just a step in the process; if they need more information, more community outreach, they would love to hear that and be able to work through it together. Sundin asked what their staffing numbers are currently and if they were ready to fully operate if it were approved with Planning Commission and ZBA. Father Tyler said that their timeline was something they were not going to totally realize this winter, and they

knew they needed to overcome this hurdle before they could start training their volunteers, which will take weeks/months; they would not be able to safely operate for many months.

Moses asked why the residents did not get enough notice to voice what they wanted to say and said that in the short term, he is concerned about approving anything that is not giving the residents in the neighborhood more time to give some input. He asked how well attended the "Identifying with Homeless" meeting was. Kihn said that there were 20 people at the meeting; they walked through the building and answered questions. Moses asked if it was mostly potential volunteers or neighbors who attended. Kihn said that it was a mix; some who were already volunteering and some individuals from the neighborhood as well. One more concern that Moses had is safety, with all the children in the neighborhood, walking traffic, bike traffic and car traffic; knowing who is going into the shelter and whether they have weapons needs to be addressed. He said that in his experience with homeless people, every single one of them carries a weapon of some sort because they are intensely worried about their personal safety.

Wojda asked if the statutory requirements were satisfied of notifying the public of the meeting. Birmingham and Sauve confirmed that requirements were met; everything was posted, and all mailers went out a minimum of 15 days prior. Kostelic said that not checking ID is concerning to her, and they should have a record of individuals coming in. Wojda asked what the governing agency is, since they are not licensed, requiring [the shelter] to stay open if the temperature is -10 degrees. Father Tyler said that it is a Federal law. Boboltz expressed his concern for the proposed rules, especially the non-identification and the less than 2,500-foot buffer zone. Wojda asked what the distance is between Hope Shores and the other shelters. Birmingham stated it is 815 feet from the Center of Charity to Sunrise Mission and 1,435 from the Center of Charity to Hope Shores Alliance. Historically, in previous city ordinances, the definitions were a bit different; a homeless shelter was not considered a residential human care facility and 'homeless shelter' had its own definition. She said there has been a distance requirement of 2,500 feet apart for homeless shelters since at least the mid to early 80's, which was changed in the 2010 update of the Ordinance and homeless shelters were merged into human care facilities, but the requirement remained 2,500 feet apart. As far as occupancy goes, there was no maximum for a residential human care facility, but there was for a homeless shelter which was 12, then 20, and then in 2010 it went up to 25.

Sundin ***motioned*** to table the request until a later date.

Moses ***seconded*** the motion.

Motion ***approved*** by unanimous vote.

One of the public in attendance asked if letters for the next meeting can be sent out to a greater area such as 1,000 feet from the proposed shelter. Father Tyler said they would do that.

Sundin asked what is happening now for the ZBA meeting variances requested. Birmingham said the case will be cancelled.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS: None.

COMMUNICATIONS OR REPORTS: December meeting is cancelled.

CONTINUING EDUCATION: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

MEMBERS' COMMENTS: None.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:11 p.m., by Boboltz, Planning Commission Chairman.

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Clayton C. VanWagoner, Secretary