

MINUTES OF THE CHESHIRE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING SPECIAL MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, MARCH 25, 2013 AT 7:30 P.M. IN COUNCIL CHAMBERS, TOWN HALL, 84 SOUTH MAIN STREET, CHESHIRE CT 06410

Present

Earl Kurtz, Chairman; Lelah Campo, S. Woody Dawson, Edward Gaudio, John Kardaras, Gil Linder, Louis Todisco.

Absent: Sean Strollo, Martin Cobern, Leslie Marinaro, Jim Bulger.

Staff: William Voelker, Town Planner

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Kurtz called the public hearing to order at 7:31 p.m.

Mr. Kurtz read the fire safety announcement.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Kurtz called the roll.

III. DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Following roll call a quorum was determined to be present.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The group Pledged Allegiance to the Flag.

V. BUSINESS

Town Planner Voelker read the call of public hearing for each application.

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| 1. Special Permit Application | PH 3/11/13 |
| <u>Robert C. Schechinger, Jr. ASLA</u> | PH 3/25/13 |
| 267 Finch Avenue | MAD 5/29/13 |
| Replace existing Chapel with a 6,048 | |
| Sq. Ft. Chapel with associated parking | |
| And site improvements. | |

Robert Schenchinger represented the applicant, along with Don Hammerberg and Christian Alford. Mr. Schenchinger clarified some items from the last public hearing, and displayed the existing conditions map of the entire facility, including the chapel. Other plans would be the 20 scale development area, without Finch Avenue in view. Studies were done and sent to Town staff members, and then informally reviewed regarding the parking situation. A police officer walked the area, wanted the collector road expanded, sub-standard parking replaced, road widened to meet safety criteria for emergency vehicle circulation. After looking at the site, it was determined there was a need for a big turn around or loop, and minimum turning radius for emergency vehicles. Doing this would destroy the Spruce buffer, a natural screening, so it was not an option. The far side was looked at with the same configuration, and all grading and Spruce

forest would have to be destroyed. The only way to get the turn around away from the building was down in the crown of the hill (pointed out on the map) going down to Suffield Court. The option which was agreed upon was a small drop off with the existing road, widen it with two shoulders, 18 feet wide, paved area 12 feet, do standard parking on one side, and connect it with a poured structural grass paver unit (areas pointed out on the map). This is the least amount of impact, least amount of coverage to allow for a loop road, and the grass structure on the outside. This provides the loop road for emergency vehicles per Fire and Police Department requests. By doing this there are no big turn around circles which would destroy existing buffer and vegetation.

There was some confusion regarding the chapel seating. There are 157 pews in the main part of the chapel; there is an activity room on the back; and it had to be shown as having all the seating if it were needed. 99% of the time the activity room is shut off by a folding solid wall with glass. If it were to be used there might be 50 seats in this room. By code there could be 272 seats in the full chapel. At 3 seats per space, there is 285 occupancy, which it is believed will never happen. Majority of all services are for the first 50 pews lapsing into the back pews. There are 30 Sisters on site with others coming from local areas and they car pool, so there is not a lot of people and additional traffic. Only 10 net parking spaces are being added, and none of this traffic is on Suffield Court, and this street will remain only for emergency vehicle access if all other access fails.

There is a report from the traffic engineer stating there is no significant impact on any traffic with the extra 10 spaces being added.

As suggested by Town Planner Voelker and the Commission regarding the concerns and views from Suffield Court, sections will be done and illustrated at scale. There was notification to the neighbors, and a meeting was held Saturday afternoon, with good input provided resulting in changes to the grading plan.

Mr. Schechinger pointed out the section lines on the map, going from the bottom to the top, Sections, A, B, C at one inch equaling 10, vertical and horizontal. Light green is the White Pines and Spruce Trees already there. The neighbors and applicant representatives walked the whole site, and it was agreed these trees are so close together and the competition has negated the under story of their plants. You can see through them right now. Once the neighbors understood what the applicant plans to do it was agreed it would be nicer to look at and more of a solid barrier, and they will not see any of the parking and barely see the building...but possibly the top of the roof could be seen. The elevation to the top is 35.5 feet.

On the map, Mr. Schechinger pointed out coming up from Suffield Court, the nice visual screen, with the berm built up 8 to 10 feet high with a variety of Evergreens which do not lose their branches, and an under story of needle and broad leaf Evergreens.

During construction the very good material on site will be pulled up and a nursery will be made on site to augment the plantings with new and old material. The existing trees

will be treated with as much saved on site as possible. On the plans, it was pointed out that the grade is being dropped down a little for the emergency grass, pervious paver system, for the circulation for emergency vehicles, and under story plantings to be removed. At grade there is the back elevation of the new chapel which will not be seen by neighbors.

The next section is at grade, highest point and most direct view into the site. The neighbors were shown this plan of heavy planting of needle Evergreens and a variety of broad leaf Evergreens as under story plantings. There will be cutting down into the grade and sinking the parking 4 feet below existing grade. Combined with the raised berm, and 4 feet down, the cars will never be seen, even at the highest grade of Suffield Court. Island plantings and foundation plantings were pointed out by Mr. Schechinger, showing exact plants, types being used, and they are to scale.

The last section coming up Suffield Court to the crown in the road where you can see the emergency access way was reviewed. Mr. Schechinger said part of the corner will be cleaned up, augmented with more Evergreen plants, but there is a nice vegetative corner right now. The vegetative screening would be maximized (pointed out on the map), and the inset would be heavily planted as you turn into the parking, with some flowering ornamental trees and Evergreens. The access way, driveway and parking are being cut down, and there is a series of Evergreen plantings on the other side of the driveway to mitigate any view into the residence and main part of the chapel.

Commission Questions and Comments

Mr. Todisco visited the site, driving and walking on Suffield Court, and he asked where the gate for Suffield Court is shown on the map.

Mr. Schechinger pointed out the gate on the map.

If you look through the area of the gate now, Mr. Todisco asked what would be seen.

When you look down the gate, Mr. Schechinger said you can see the guest house top floor, garage and part of the residence. With the augmented planting proposed there will be a more solid band of plantings and movement of a berm.

Mr. Todisco asked where the chapel would be in relation to the gate.

Mr. Schechinger pointed out the new chapel location on the map, and said it is more than 100 feet from the gate.

Mr. Todisco asked about the new chapel, and it being 80 feet away from Suffield Court.

In response, Mr. Schechinger said it is about 85 feet, and this is noted on the site contacts map.

If you are walking down Suffield Court from the gate towards Finch Avenue, Mr. Todisco asked about plantings which will shield the chapel from view.

Mr. Schechinger said it is contended that the chapel would not be seen.

Mr. Gaudio visited the site, and said he his happy to see what is planned. His only question is the needle pines, noting that an Arbor Vide type tree grows higher and spreads out more, is thicker, denser and provides more privacy. He would prefer Arbor Vides through this area.

According to Mr. Schechinger this species of tree will be part of the plantings, but the applicant does not want a mono-culture as there is now with all the Spruce trees. It is good to have visual variety and there are ecological reasons to have variety of plantings. He said that once the area with high Spruce and Pine trees is cleared out this dark margin of the property will become sunny and provide for growth of a variety of plantings.

When there is a function on site and the parking gets to capacity, Mr. Gaudio asked how this would work out.

Mr. Schechinger said the parking meets the requirements of Town regulations. Also, the user population live on site or nearby and car pool. Outside people come to the site only 4 of 5 times a year, when it would get close to capacity of the chapel. When the functions occur they are on weekends or before or after normal work hours for the rest of the facility, and there would not be conflict with other on-site activities.

Mr. Gaudio asked if there is parking on Suffield Court when the facility has functions.

There is no parking on Suffield Court, and Mr. Schechinger clarified that once a year they have the holiday festival in the fall, and there is a large crowd, with people parking everywhere. In order to design parking for this event, it would require a parking garage...and it is once year for a good cause. No one seems to be concerned about this once a year event parking.

Mr. Dawson asked if this application has gone to Beautification Committee on the planting and landscape plans.

In reply, Mr. Schechinger said he did not know this was a requirement, but the applicant would be pleased to present the plans to this committee. He noted that there have been many meetings with Town staff on the plans and all comments have received a response.

Chairman Kurtz stated that because of the plans submitted at this meeting, the public hearing would be left open for Commissioners to review them.

PUBLIC

Eric Martone, 19 Suffield Court, said there is confusion. If the chapel holds 150 people but can be expanded to 280, and is never used to that capacity, why is a 6,000 sq. ft. chapel needed. He does not believe there is justification or reason for this size chapel. Public activities are held at the chapel, and people park on Suffield Court for a good cause. With this large chapel there is nothing to stop them in the future from turning this into more events annually, and there is no guarantee this would not happen. Once this is built it will be there forever and change the character of the neighborhood bringing hundreds of people to the facility, as happens with the Christmas Fair. He said Mr. Schechinger just argued that they don't need this as a chapel, and other religious gatherings are held in Meriden as has been done for years. The current arrangement has been going on for 20 years, and he questions why they need this 6,000 sq. ft. chapel. While he appreciates the trees and it addresses some of the short term concerns, they do not address long term concerns. This large chapel will have a significant impact on this neighborhood, and this not for profit corporation will expand with nothing stopping them. He is opposed to this project. Finch Avenue and Suffield Court are narrow roads, and sometimes becomes a one lane road not built for this type of traffic.

For clarification, Mr. Schechinger said the word activity is used in multiple ways here. The one fund raising event has been held for a long time and will continue. The main chapel of 150 seats is needed because the current chapel and activity room because activities are held in basement of other buildings due to lack of room for group activities. It is not changing the number of people coming on site for the activity area, but it is a room to function for all in-house activities for the programs. It is not inviting extra people into the site. If the chapel is ever used to full capacity there is enough parking as required on site.

Mr. Martone asked about their not bringing in more people, and why they need a 6,000 sq. ft. facility from an 800 sq. ft. facility.

In response, Mr. Schechinger said the current chapel is too small for daily use, and expanding it will have extra people for weekend services. They are sub-standard on site now, and they do not want to crowd in. All on-site parking is adequate for the types of use, and is not anticipated to be totally filled. The activity room has accordion walls which can close most of the time. A central place is needed for activities which are now dispersed around the campus due to lack of one large room.

Mr. Dawson asked for the total square footage of the site.

Mr. Schechinger said it is 22.1 acres. Building coverage is only 2.5 % versus 10%, and with all the impervious it is about 12%.

Mr. Dawson asked about someone owning this property and putting in many condominiums, and he tries to look at all sides of the picture and figure it out.

Mr. Schechinger said that, theoretically, someone could build another 8.5% coverage on the site which would be hundreds of thousands of square feet.

According to Mr. Dawson, this is food for thought.

Mr. Todisco asked about the activity room which is part of the chapel, and it being used for activities, other than over flow for the church services...and if this was correct.

Mr. Schechinger said this was correct. These functions occur in different places on site now, but none of the basement rooms are sufficient to do activities in one central place.

Regarding the activities being talked about, Mr. Todisco said they do not involve people coming in from the public.

Sister Suzanne Gross said she lives in the house which will have the chapel addition, and said she has been in Meriden, living on site since 1987. She invited people to visit the site and the house, and the community is blessed with new members. The chapel holds 48 people and most times it is not enough room for people who want to come. The time when the property is busiest is 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. There is a home health office on site, nurses coming and going serving people in 30 towns; there is the Franciscan Life Center; and chapel activities have been going on for 20+ years. There will be little difference from this, and the chapel is private for the Sisters in the order. Activities with invited people would be when a Sister makes final vows, and this is once a year. Regarding the fair, the Sisters are grateful for people who participate. Suffield Court was originally part of the acreage of the site, was sold to build the senior housing across the street. The two wings of the chapel have a Sacristy and now a bathroom; families come to visit and a living room is needed; there is car pooling to get to the site; and Sisters pray in that chapel four times a day as a community, and Mass once a day. There is no public Mass on Sunday, so there is no large crowd on Sunday, except when there are final vows taking place. Meriden is the site of the Mother House since 1970; in 1982, 14 acres were acquired in Meriden and 4 acres in Cheshire and this became the site of the Franciscan Life Center. At this time the Sisters need a place to pray with a larger chapel. Sister Gross said the community wants to protect the enclosure as much as the neighbors, and build a berm to provide privacy as there is now. Sister said she wants people to be peaceful about this as the community can continue to make the neighborhood peaceful and quiet and not infringe on the needs of neighbors.

At times there can be a meeting of the Sisters in the activity room for the 34 Sisters and 3 Brothers. There will not be invitation of other people, and they want to take the existing chapel and rebuild it to provide space for the meeting room, along with a little kitchenette. Sister Gross said the chapel needs an organ and music area which is part of the space. The two car garage has been the Sacristy and cloak room. If people came to visit they would understand the reasoning for the new chapel.

Mr. Martone stated that if things continue as they are and the chapel will not be used, he questioned why a 6,000 sq. ft. building is needed. There could be expansion doubling the existing chapel, and he has not heard reasoning for a massive expansion.

Sister Gross said the Sacristy is a good sized building; the walkway is a good size; and the chapel is being turned from facing Suffield Court, facing east, and they want a larger sanctuary for the Priest. It is crowded now; more space between pews is needed; and there has never been a bathroom area, and this is all part of the square footage. An entrance had to be added on both sides. In looking at the pictures the chapel will not be seen, and will be a beautiful place of worship, is on one floor, and lower than the present garage. The goal is to have everything look better than it is now, and the Suffield Court entrance has worn down, and needs to be beautified.

Walter Wright, 20 Suffield Court, thanked the Sisters and talked about the once a year holiday event with traffic spilling onto Suffield Court. He said the Sisters are responsible, things have been orderly, and it is not an issue for him after being there 13 years. If they continue to show this level of responsibility this boosts his confidence. Mr. Wright asked about the drawings, elevations, new berms, and height of trees being at the end of construction or after maturity.

In response, Mr. Schechnger said it is at installation, minimum height.

Mr. Wright asked about the meeting where residents walked the property, and who was in attendance.

Mr. Schechinger said the plants shown are at the height at installation. He is not sure who was at the meeting.

One of the neighbors, Christopher Jakubowski, 15 Suffield Court, has lived in the area for 13 years. He commented on the once a year event at the facility, and he does not expect his neighbors who have a private function to park on the street. He said he feels measuring and gauging the square footage of the chapel is an intrusion on the privacy, and does not expect his neighbors to know the square footage of his house and how it is used and how frequently. For the meeting with the Sisters, Mr. Stouffer and Mr. Blanc attended the meeting. After walking the grounds they concurred that the current project leaving the remaining berm and planting more visually acceptable shrubbery would enhance the visual aspects of the street. They are content with the plan, know how well the Sisters are taking care of the property, and they have no concerns in terms of the next few years. We don't know what will happen in 20 years, but right now we have to put some cornerstone on what is being built and develop it in the community.

Charles Jonketro, 136 Skyline Drive, has lived in the area for 15 years, and as far as he is concerned he has not seen anybody that handles property the way the Sisters keep up their property, beautifying it, really trying to fit in and maintain the natural ego systems. Any development the Sisters do is more desirable than any commercial or

residential development. Their use of the property is much less than some of the developments down the street, around the corner, with many houses proposed and things going into the area. Much of the open space is disappearing. He is happy to have the Sisters there.

Bill Negras, 41 Suffield Court, a resident of 35 years and on Suffield Court 19 to 20 years. It's a wonderful street, and he has concerns about safety for his handicapped daughter. The one activity she can do is walk the sidewalk and be safe. An issue is leaves and branches where she can't see them. He sees the volume of people coming onto this area, more cars, turning around and coming down Suffield Court. This is a residential area, and the Sisters take care of their property, and he wants to insure his daughter can walk the street safely. Finch Avenue is so narrow and just enough for 2 cars, and a school bus can barely fit, with people pulling over to let the bus pass. This road has many potholes and this road must be taken care of as it is dangerous. He respects what the Sisters want to do and said they have the right to do it, but he has safety concerns.

Terry Fokowski, 10 Suffield Court, the house directly across from where the chapel and parking lot will be located, and she has concerns about privacy. Her house can see the cars parked there now, and want privacy, i.e. denser trees such as Arbor Vides.

Mr. Todisco asked about being able to see what is going on at the Sisters' facility from the street level, and with the berm and trees he could not see too much.

According to Ms. Fokowski, through her front window you can see lights and cars parked as the trees are tall and nothing is low growing right now.

Mr. Todisco stated that the applicant might want to address this as the focus has been on the lower level.

Ms. Fokowski has concerns about how the trees would grow over the years, if they are dense and close enough to block her view, such as Arbor Vides being close and tight. Ten more parking spaces are being added and privacy is a concern.

Chairman Kurtz stated that with new trees, other than White Pines, the problems should be solved.

THE PUBLIC HEARING WAS KEPT OPEN AND CONTINUED TO 4/8/13

2. **Special Permit Application**
Hanna Choi
1033 South Main Street (1021)
Nail Salon

PH 3/25/13
MAD 5/29/13

Hanna Choi, Trumbull, CT, wants to open a nail salon, Paradise Spa & Nails, LLC, 1033 South Main Street, in the Everybody's Shopping Center. The letters and application

have been submitted to the Planning Department and copies were given to the Commission.

Mr. Kardaras asked if there would be licensed massage therapists in the facility.

Ms. Choi said that was correct.

Mr. Gaudio asked how many employees will operate in the facility, and how many would there be in the future. He also asked how many stations will be in the salon.

The salon will start with five people, and Ms. Choi said if they get busy there will be more employees. There are 8 manicure tables and 7 pedicure chairs.

With that many stations, Mr. Gaudio said there could be up to 15 people at one time.

Ms. Choi said the space is 2400 sq. ft. so there is a limitation.

It was noted by Ms. Campo that the person doing the nails also does the pedicure, so there would be a limit of 8 employees.

Chairman Kurtz read the comments from the Fire Department, Chief Casner, into the record; and he read the comments from the Engineering Department into the record. A letter in opposition to the nail salon from Loong Voong who recently opened a nail salon across the street from the proposed salon.

THE PUBLIC HEARING WAS CLOSED.

3. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Ms. Campo; seconded by Mr. Kardaras.

MOVED to adjourn at 8:40 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk