

**PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
MINUTES – APRIL 20, 2021**

The meeting of the Towanda Borough Planning Commission was held on Tuesday, April 20, 2021 in the Council Room of the Towanda Municipal Building, 724 Main Street, Towanda, PA.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Jim Lacek at 7:00 PM.

Members Present Jim Lacek-Chairman, Karen Johnson-Vice-Chairman, Mark Christini, Kevin Doupe', Erin Groves, Jimmy Lacek, Diane Siegmund

Members Absent Kayla Saxon (on maternity)

Visitors Maureen Walsh, Kiesha Belles, Bob Ames & Damian Rossettie, Esq. for Allied Health Care Services

Minutes

A motion was made by Karen Johnson and seconded by Jimmy Lacek to approve the minutes of the December 15, 2020, Planning Commission Meeting. Motion passed.

New Business

A. Conditional Use Hearing for Allied Services, 846 South Main Street, Towanda, PA.

Attorney Rossetti introduced Mr. Bob Ames, Vice President of Community Services for Allied Health Care Services to explain Allied Health Service's intended use for the property at 846 Main Street. Allied has signed an agreement of sale to purchase the property contingent on a conditional use to allow individuals to reside on the first floor of this one-story building. He stated that that Allied's Behavioral Health Division works in conjunction with Bradford County Mental Health Organization. The idea for this building is to have 2 separate, 3-unit residency for individuals that need mental health services (mental health illness diagnosis).

He stated the context sounds like a group home and it is similar but the difference is that group homes usually house individuals for many years and this program does not. Therefore, they have applied for "conditional use." The service will help treat individuals with mental health issues get to the next step in life so they could be out in the community and in their own residences. Allied Services does operate in Towanda with a residence on Mix Avenue that has 5 people living there and provides supportive services for other individuals. 846 South Main Street will house 6 individuals that will be referred by Bradford County, and Allied will evaluate them to determine if they would be appropriate for the South Main street setting.

A person could be in the program for a year, 2 years, typically it does not happen for more than 3 years, and then hopefully they will be placed out in the community. The County Mental Health organization deals with a population of people with mental health issues that live in Bradford County. They will evaluate a person who may come to them for help and will refer them to Allied's program.

Also, Mr. Ames stated that Allied Systems has about 50 to 60 total clients that live in community that they support daily.

The clients will be 18 years and over and no sex offenders will be in the program at this building. He also stated that Northern Tier Counseling will provide services for the clients (at the Northern Tier Counseling location). Allied can provide their transportation if needed.

It will be staffed for 3 – 8-hour shifts (24 hours) with 1 staff supervisor for 1st shift, and 1 residential counselor will work a split shift. Sometimes they could have 3 people or more if the director or assistant director comes to the building. The norm is that the facility will be staffed around the clock. Mr. Ames also said that they plan on using this building for their staff meetings instead of the Mix Avenue location they currently use (where parking is a problem). A concern some of the board had was the lack of green space available for the housed individuals. Allied stated that they would plan on having an area with a picnic table and maybe a basketball hoop. They were then asked about the steep bank that faces the highway where a gathering or recreation area would be placed, as it may be a danger for the residents. The Planning Commission suggested fencing be installed and Mr. Ames stated that that they would consider it.

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Mr. Christini stated that in Chapter 325. Zoning, Article IX. Administration and Enforcement §325-74.1. Conditional use, letter “B. (1), it states that the Borough Council may either permit or deny the use based on existing standards and if the three additional listed conditions (a), (b) & (c) are met.

A motion was made by Karen Johnson and seconded by Jimmy Lacek to move this request on to Borough Council with the condition that fencing will be installed. Motion passed.

The next regular council meeting will be held on Monday, May 3rd, at 7 PM.

Old Business

Signage:

Mr. Doupe’ brought up old business concerning the request of Vicki Wells to use electronic signage in Madigan Park (to advertise Recreation Committee and other events taking place in the borough). The sign that is there now is not electronic but a kiosk with white letters that you manually put messages on.

Mr. Christini stated that the type of signage Ms. Wells desires this does not fit our existing ordinance of (electronic) internally illuminated signs being prohibited. However, illuminated signs are allowed and maybe the kiosk in Madigan Park may be able to have a light source projected on it.

Mr. Christini made a couple points, stating that concerning the sign ordinance that was put in effect some 25 years ago, the driving theme was to make the town something that would be compatible to a Victorian theme for the future. The Corning, NY, sign ordinance was a model that we used here. However, Corning, NY, has a sign committee that covers colors, dimensions, etc., which we don’t have the resources, and it would be difficult for us to legislate signs in this way. Therefore, Council, at the time decided to prohibit internally illuminated signs on Main Street. The other thing is that any sign like the one that is across the street from the borough building (Madigan Park) could easily be illuminated externally. The only difficulty is that messages have to be changed manually. He feels messages in this format can still be accomplished with the kiosk. Also, Ms. Well’s request for an electronic sign would be considered a new sign.

After much discussion, the committee stated that they would like more information from Ms. Wells concerning her ideas, and they need to talk about the use of the existing signage. **A motion was made by Jimmy Lacek and seconded by Erin Groves requesting more information from Ms. Wells of what may be wrong with the existing sign and what we may be able to do with it. Motion passed.**

Vacant Property Ordinance:

Mr. Christini stated that concerning the drafting of the Registration Process of Vacant Property, there is an ordinance in Arlington, MA. whereby the annual registration fee can be waived by owners agreeing to display public art for the term of the vacancy. Mr. Christini stated that Manager Lane would like to see the focus first on the commercial (what you can see) spaces.

For the next meeting in May, the committee will review the occupied and vacant definitions so they can discuss what has been done so far and talk about ideas concerning the commercial side of the ordinance.

New Business

From the GOOGLE DOC link:

Moving forward on the PROPERTY MAINTENANCE ORDINANCE: Google Doc link located at:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/10Ewr9TGcsmdUMju18rOkL798PBUpyHLWcJQ383YdKeE/edit>

FUTURE Business (at a Later Date)

A. Update Regional Comprehensive Plan – Regional Comprehensive Plan 2007 links:

This will have to wait until after the CENSUS is complete, Manager Lane to apply for DCED grant money.

[Central Bradford Comprehensive Plan Executive Summary](#)

[Central Bradford Region Comprehensive Plan](#)

[Central Bradford Region Comprehensive Plan Appendix](#)

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- B. Manager Lane updated the Committee on the SCI Master Plan. He submitted for an update of that plan to the DCED for funding to hire a consultant to do it for us. He stated that he would like the Planning Commission to be the point Committee for part of the planning process if we receive the DCED grant.**

The following projects he identified for improvements will be bundled together:

1. Tommy Fairchild Memorial Park (formerly Riverfront Park)
2. YMCA (SCI) Complex Master Plan (including the Memorial Park playground)
3. Third Ward Park, the Pocket Park
4. The TRAIL project with the possibility of connecting all Towanda Borough Parks and municipal grounds with the trail.

This grant, if approved, will probably not happen until sometime in 2021 (depending on when it gets addressed by DCED).

Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn was made by Karen Johnson seconded by Diane Siegmund at 8:45 PM.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 18th at 7 PM.



Recording Secretary
Planning Commission