

**TOWANDA BOROUGH COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
PUBLIC HEARING
September 17, 2026**

The Towanda Borough Council Special Meeting and Public Hearing was held on Thursday, September 17, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. at the Borough Municipal Building, 724 Main Street, Towanda, PA.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Eberlin, Mr. Roof, Mr. Saring, Mr. Schultz, Mr. Kovalcin, Mr. Christini, Mrs. Miller, Mr. Parks, and Mrs. Hatch

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

OTHERS PRESENT:

Fred Smith, Borough Solicitor; Barry Thrush, Code Enforcement Officer; Daily Review Reporter; Leigh Lattimer, Secretary/Treasurer; and a Stenographer from Sargent

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD:

Vicki Wells, Theresa Sawerstein, Tiffany Johnson, Leslie Wizelman, Laurie McGuire, Jeremy Ragan, Beau Ryck, Leesa Ryck, Kevin Doupe, Jolena Bartholomew, Shane Mize, Aaron Lamphere, Dixie Cabucci, Dick Farley, Father Dan Storrs, Patrick Haines, Roger Hatch, Tobi Kinsman, Jeff Smith, and David Rustrio

PUBLIC HEARING

The Public Hearing concerned an application submitted by Beyond Addiction Recovery and Treatment Center, LLC for a conditional use at 424–428 Main Street. The property is located in the C-2 Commercial District. The applicant is seeking to operate a structured, 24-hour supervised recovery residence serving women who have completed detoxification and residential treatment programs.

OPENING AND DECORUM — PRESIDENT EBERLIN

President Eberlin opened the conditional use hearing for Beyond Addiction at 424–428 Main Street.

President Eberlin thanked the large crowd for attending and noted that not everyone would agree on the matter. He asked that discussion remain civil and respectful so that he would not need to use the gavel frequently.

President Eberlin then turned the floor over to Borough Solicitor Fred Smith to explain the formal hearing procedure and party status.

SOLICITOR'S INTRODUCTION — FRED SMITH

Solicitor Fred Smith explained the formal conditional use hearing procedure, including party status, the role of Council as an adjudicatory body, and the use of a stenographic record. He outlined that testimony must be relevant, orderly, and respectful.

Solicitor Smith summarized the zoning framework and Borough exhibits to be entered into the record, noting that Council's decision must be based on the conditional use criteria contained in the Zoning Ordinance and may include reasonable conditions.

PUBLIC COMMENTS/CONCERNS

Jolena Bartholomew, 513 Main Street — Opposed (Location):

Supports treatment but opposes the facility being located on Main Street, citing existing drug-related issues downtown and concerns regarding potential negative effects on nearby businesses.

Tiffany Johnson, 300 Bride Street — In Support:

As a woman in long-term recovery who works in the field, she stated that local women often leave jail or the streets with nowhere safe to go. She expressed support for the facility, stating that it would help prevent homelessness, create jobs, and reuse a vacant building.

Dick Farley, 521 Main Street — Concern Regarding Precedent:

Expressed concern that approving the facility on Main Street could set a precedent for additional residential-type uses and gradually change the commercial character of downtown.

Jeremy Ragan — Opposed (Economic Impact/Location):

Stated that he values the work performed by Beyond Addiction but argued that a halfway house on Main Street could discourage private investment and tourism-focused development. He referenced Williamsport's experience as a caution.

Beau Ryck, 108 Chestnut Street — Opposed (Zoning Basis):

Stated that he supports the mission of the facility but believes the proposed use is essentially residential and should be located in an R-3 area under the Zoning Ordinance rather than in the C-2 downtown district.

Leslie Wizelman, Borough Property Owner — In Support:

Urged approval, stating that people in recovery are not actively using substances and should not be hidden. She stated that the facility would save lives and bring additional foot traffic to downtown businesses.

Roger Hatch, 101 York Avenue — In Support:

Described the project as a business use consistent with Main Street's office-below, housing-above pattern and stated that a controlled, sober facility would improve safety and walkability.

Other Commenters — Mixed Views on Site:

Commenters generally agreed that treatment is needed in Towanda but questioned the Main Street location. Some preferred a less-central or more rural site due to concerns regarding the long-term economic vision for downtown.

BEYOND ADDICTION — APPLICANT STATEMENT SUMMARY

Beyond Addiction is proposing a small, women-only Level 3.1 recovery residence at 424–428 Main Street for women who have already completed detoxification and higher-level treatment.

The program would house approximately 26–30 residents, with 24/7 staffed supervision, licensed counselors, strict schedules, and no walk-in or outpatient services. The first floor would remain offices and group rooms, with sleeping areas located only on the upper floors. Residents would not have vehicles on site and would be transported by staff for work, appointments, and meetings.

The applicant emphasized security, drug testing, controlled visitation, and compliance with DDAP licensing standards. The applicant stated that its existing programs have strong recovery outcomes and argued that the project would reuse a long-vacant building, add local jobs, and return the property to the tax rolls without increasing crime or reducing property values.

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP/AGREEMENT OF SALE:

In response to questions from Solicitor Fred Smith regarding standing and whether a written agreement of sale exists for 424-428 Main Street, Sara Webster, CEO and founder stated Beyond Addiction intends to purchase the property from Trehab if conditional use is approved, and that attorneys for both parties are drafting a sales agreement. She explained that finalization has been delayed due to a recent death in Trehab's executive director's family and because Beyond Addiction seeks to complete a building inspection before committing to a fixed purchase price, given the likely need for new roof and other repairs. Sara indicated that the agreement is expected to include inspection and pricing contingencies and will be submitted for inclusion in record once available.

CONCLUSION OF TESTIMONY — PRESIDENT EBERLIN

After public and party comments concluded, President Eberlin closed the testimony portion of the hearing and confirmed that the record might remain open only for limited items, such as the Trehab-Beyond Addiction purchase agreement, needed to establish standing.

President Eberlin stated that Council would recess to executive session for the limited purpose of receiving legal advice regarding issues related to the conditional use application, and that no deliberation on the merits of the application would occur during that session. Following the executive session, Council reconvened in open meeting, at which time all deliberation on the conditional use application took place on the record in accordance with applicable law.

EXECUTIVE SESSION — 9:03 P.M.

CONDITIONAL USE APPLICATION — DELIBERATION AND DECISION

Council reconvened in open session at 9:16 p.m. following an executive session for legal advice related to the conditional use application for a residential recovery facility in the C-2 Central Business District.

The President outlined the three required criteria for conditional use approval and opened the floor for deliberation.

Council first discussed whether the proposed use is compatible with uses permitted in the C-2 district. Some members noted that the first floor would contain offices and meeting space with residential units on the upper floors, similar to other mixed-use buildings downtown, and found the use compatible. Others stated that they view the C-2 district as intended for commercial rather than primarily residential facilities and therefore did not see the use as consistent with the basic purpose of the district.

Council next considered whether the use is permitted in any other zoning district. A public comment had suggested that the use could be treated as an R-3 “rooming house.” The Solicitor reviewed the Ordinance definitions and advised that a rooming house requires a single dwelling unit plus additional rented rooms, with stays for a defined period of at least one week.

Because the proposed program is structured as a residential treatment program with stays of approximately 90 days to six months, without a fixed lodging term and not as a typical boarding or rooming operation, the Solicitor concluded that it does not meet the rooming house definition and is not expressly provided for in any district. Several members indicated agreement with this interpretation.

Council then discussed whether the proposed use would adversely affect the neighborhood or conflict with the general purposes of the Zoning Chapter. Members raised questions regarding off-street parking, building occupancy, and bedroom window/natural light requirements.

The applicant confirmed that all bedrooms would have windows and described a plan to convert a portion of the lower parking area/drive-through lane into a fenced green space for residents.

Some members stated that they had initial concerns about the number and type of residents but were satisfied by the applicant's explanation of program structure, supervision, and access controls. Others maintained that, while they did not expect significant adverse neighborhood impacts, they continued to view the use as inconsistent with the intended commercial character of the C-2 district.

During deliberation, Council discussed occupancy limits, noting that the applicant had planned for 26 residents, while the Planning Commission had previously recommended 25 as an advisory cap. The Solicitor confirmed that Council has the authority to attach conditions to the approval.

Council members generally agreed that, given building and parking constraints, a firm numerical limit was appropriate. The applicant stated that 26 residents is the preferred and workable future expansion.

Following discussion, a motion was made by W. Kovalcin, seconded by M. Hatch, to approve the conditional use application with a condition limiting occupancy to a maximum of 26 residents, excluding staff.

After brief final comments, a roll-call vote was taken, resulting in five votes in favor and four votes against. The motion carried.

The President announced that a written decision reflecting the approval and the 26-resident occupancy cap would be issued within 45 days and that any party aggrieved may appeal to the Court of Common Pleas within 30 days of the written decision.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Leigh Lattimer

Towanda Borough Secretary