

REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF
THE CONCEPTUAL PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE

OF THE VILLAGE OF ARLINGTON HEIGHTS PLAN COMMISSION

HELD AT VILLAGE HALL VIRTUALLY ON:

June 9, 2021

Project Title: Shelter, Inc. SUP
Address: 207-209 E. Valley Lane
Arlington Heights, IL 60004

Petitioner: Carina H. Santa Maria - Shelter, Inc.
Address: 1616 Arlington Heights Road
Arlington Heights, IL 60004

Requested Action:

1. Special Use Permit to allow a "Shelter Care Home" on the subject property.

Variations Required:

1. Variation to Chapter 28, Section 10.4, Schedule of Parking Requirements, to reduce the number of onsite parking spaces from 10 spaces to two spaces.

Attendees:

David Bea, Bea & VandenBerk Attorneys
Carina H. Santa Maria, Petitioner
Maria Brauer, Shelter Inc.
John Sigalos, Plan Commissioner
Bruce Green, Plan Commissioner
Jay Cherwin, Plan Commissioner
Lynn Jensen, Plan Commissioner
Sam Hubbard, Development Planner

Project Summary:

The petitioner appeared at the Conceptual Plan Review Committee on May 26, 2021 for a preliminary review of the project. The meeting was adjourned before discussion was complete on the proposal. Accordingly, the petitioner is appearing again before the Conceptual Plan Review Committee to complete discussion on the matter.

The petitioner has provided additional details on their program, which address many of the questions raised during the May 26 meeting. As a result of the discussion on May 26, the Police Department has provided additional detail into the calls for service generated by the existing Shelter Inc. location on Golf Road:

- Since beginning operation in 2012, there have been a total of 553 calls for service at the Shelter Inc. property on Golf Road. There are two types of calls for service: criminal and non-criminal. Criminal calls can range from residential burglaries, criminal damage to property, motor vehicle burglaries, battery, financial crimes, theft, etc. Non-criminal calls are suspicious person, vehicle, incident; fire/ambulance calls, well-being checks, traffic accidents, alarms, etc.
- There were 51 criminal related calls which included battery, domestic battery, assaults, theft, motor vehicle theft, disorderly conduct, alcohol & drug offenses, and criminal damage/trespass to property.
- There were a total of 391 runaway/missing adult/missing juvenile reports generated at the Golf Road location. Five of these calls for service were determined to be duplicate reports (reports that had already been documented).
- The remaining 105 calls were non-criminal in nature such as suspicious persons, incidents, and vehicles; traffic accidents, alarms, public service, well-being checks, unwanted subjects, ambulance calls, outside department assists, and domestic trouble (no arrests made) etc.

Meeting Discussion:

Commissioner Green stated that the Committee had not had a chance to finish discussion on the Shelter Inc. project from their last meeting and they were going to pick up where they left off at the end of the last meeting.

Mr. Hubbard explained that Commissioner Jensen and Commissioner Cherwin had made comments at the last meeting, but Commissioner Sigalos and Chair Green had yet to make their comments.

Commissioner Green said that he believed Commissioner Cherwin may have been cut short of finishing his comments at the last meeting and he asked if Commissioner Cherwin had anything additional to discuss.

Commissioner Cherwin said he had finished and was ready to move on to the next Commissioner.

Commissioner Sigalos said he is concerned with the location being in a residential neighborhood. He has concern with the children in the neighborhood and has read a lot of the public emails that have been sent in. There were concerns over the number of police calls, which averaged 53 calls in the last two years. Not all criminal, but it was still concerning. He was also concerned with parking.

Mr. Hubbard stated that Shelter Inc. has provided additional information on their program, which was posted online and made a part of the Conceptual Plan Review Committee record. Staff has communicated with the Police Department and has obtained specific information on the calls for service from the existing facility. There have been many emails received relative to this project and they have all been placed online as well.

Ms. Santa Maria stated that Shelter Inc. was founded by an Arlington Heights Police Officer. They have been in the community since 1975. Shelter Inc. is a transitional living program. The property at 207 East Valley Lane was chosen to expand their program and meet the needs of the community. It's a residential home, but not a Single-family home. Location is important as it's within walking distance to many jobs locally and residents would be able to walk to these locations. She explained that the youths at this location are supervised by staff which is on location for 24 hours a day and this includes over night shifts. Shelter Inc. is licensed by Illinois Department of Children & Family services, also accredited by the Counsel of Accreditation, which is a national organization. They meet all national and state laws. They are required to know where the residents are at every hour of the day. They are very involved in each residents' lives. Security cameras are installed throughout the entire property. Staff is trained for this program. There is a curfew at this facility. Police are involved if youth is not home by 1:00 AM. 391 of the calls for service over the last 10 years were relative to curfew violations. The program does not accept youth that have a record as a sex offender. This program is not a danger to the community; there will be consistent communication with the Arlington Heights Police Department. There has been communication with Chief Pecora about the programming and they have initiated their own clinical program. All the youths at the transitional living facility have a dedicated therapist and a case manager that they have access to 24 hours a day. They were recently picked as one of Northwestern Universities only THINK trauma agencies in the state, which means all of their staff have gone through very rigorous training to work with youths that have experienced trauma. They are highly trained in dealing with de-escalation tactics for when conflicts arise. She stated that out of the 69 emails received, it was apparent that there was more support for this program than opposition.

Mr. Bea added that with respect to the emails that were received from the community, specifically the ones that were negative, he mentioned several of them expressed concern that the location was close to Ivy School. He stated the location is actually four to five blocks from Ivy School. He said that any neighbor who thought that this location was one block away from the school was mistaken and he thought that this might have been some of the reason for their opposition. The location was a good compromise in that it was at the edge of the neighborhood. It was a good location for their facility in that it was not the most desirable location in the neighborhood. It was surrounded on both sides by two-family homes. Relative to parking, the facility would not provide parking for residents. While a resident could purchase a car, they could not park it at the home and typically they did not have the funds to purchase a vehicle. Over all the years that the facility has been in operation, only two residents have owned cars. If they have a car they need to figure out a place to park it since it cannot be parked on the property.

Commissioner Jensen asked where the residents would be coming from.

Ms. Santa Maria stated that the individuals are mostly from Arlington Heights and some from surrounding suburbs. The youths are enrolled in schools like Hersey, Rolling Meadows, and Fremd. Some of the youths are working at Cooper's Hawk, Jewel, and Staples. They are already in the community and many people may have already interacted with them and don't even know it.

Commissioner Jensen stated that 391 calls about runaways was a large number, but he was more concerned about the 51 criminal calls and 105 non-criminal incident calls over the last 10 years, which seemed to him like a high volume of calls. He asked about the nature of those calls.

Ms. Santa Maria stated that the calls are mostly internal calls related to issues between the youths in the home, for example one youth took five video games from another youth in the home. To address these types of things they have started their clinical program and updated their screening tools. From 2016 to today there have only been 74 calls. They have made necessary changes for the youths.

Commissioner Jensen stated that even 74 calls since 2016 for issues that couldn't be resolved by staff is still a concern. He would feel better if most of the issues could be resolved by staff and 74 calls seemed like a high volume. He asked about the number of staff.

Ms. Santa Maria responded that out of the 74 calls, many of them were for curfew violations. But still they want to reduce the call volume so that's why they have taken it upon themselves to be CPI trained in de-escalation techniques so that they can avoid calls to the police. Police involvement can be triggering and traumatic for their residents so they try to avoid police involvement.

Commissioner Jensen asked about the number of staff.

Ms. Santa Maria replied that there would always be one staff per unit. They stated "up to two" because they have a ratio that must be followed; one staff per six residents. If they only have six residents in the program they would only have one staff member present. They do not accept youths with severe mental health issues.

Commissioner Jensen said he went over the manual and it seemed overwhelming.

Commissioner Green said he is very concerned about this facility at this location. He mentioned the volume of police calls (53 criminal calls). If there is 24-hour supervision but still criminal calls, he viewed that as a breakdown in supervision. He stated that he needs to take in consideration what the neighborhood needs are and what is good for the surrounding residents.

Commissioner Sigalos asked about the youths in the program, are they there due to family issues and they have nowhere to go? He asked about the background on the youths.

Ms. Santa Maria stated that all the kids are in DCFS custody. They come from neglect, trauma, or some type of family issue where the parents were not able to take care of them. She asked to read in a letter:

Dear Mr. Hubbard,

My name is Christian Gajda, and I am an 18 year old youth currently placed at Shelter's Transitional Living Program. My younger brothers and I were placed in DCFS care in August 2020 due to both of my parent's substance abuse issues and abusive treatment to us. My brothers were placed in foster homes; however, it was challenging to find me a foster home that would accept me simply because of my age. I was placed at Shelter's emergency shelter while my caseworker continued to search for a permanent placement for me. I was recommended for a TLP, and Shelter's TLP interviewed and accepted me. I moved into the TLP on February 24, 2021.

I was raised in Lake Forest, IL and previously attended Lake Forest High School. I add that information because many people want to believe that DCFS youth all come from "inner city Chicago", however, I am far from it. In fact, the other five youth in our TLP did not come from Chicago either. We all came from the suburbs, and none of us have a "street mentality". With Shelter's TLP being in Arlington Heights, we can live in a setting that we have all been familiar with and feel safe. We can attend good schools and receive a good education. We can get good jobs where we can learn to save and budget our money appropriately. The Shelter staff are very involved with each of us here, and they teach us how to cook, clean, make medical appointments, take care of ourselves, apply for jobs, create resumes, and open bank accounts. We are responsible for chores in the home and making sure we keep our bedrooms clean. I have a caseworker here that is very involved with me and the other kids. She is in constant contact with our schools, monitors our employment, and holds staffing's with us to set our short-term goals in order to work towards our long-term goal of independence. I have a therapist that meets with me weekly, and she holds therapeutic groups every other week with all of us. There is staff available to us and supervising the home 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

If someone were to ask me what it means to be at Shelter's TLP, I would have to say that it means so much to me to have people believe in me and help me to become independent since my parents are not there to help me with this. I am not a bad kid. I am a kid whose parents aren't there for me now to teach me and help me with what I need to know.

Commissioner Sigalos said that he understands the kids are coming to this shelter due to a difficult home life and not because they are troubled kids.

Ms. Santa Maria reiterated that the kids are coming to the shelter for help. She knows that this program can change people's lives. They need help from the community and help from Shelter Inc.

Commissioner Green acknowledged the points from Ms. Santa Maria. He wanted to hear what the neighbors had to say as he felt that there are two sides to every argument. The facility will affect the neighbor's lives in a very hard way. This is something that needs to be worked out. He said while the facility may provide good services, it can have a negative impact in other ways. As a homeowner, he would hate to think that his neighbor is making 53 police calls a year. He said he's lived at his home over 35 years and never has had one police call. It's a different way of life and may or may not fit in the neighborhood.

Commissioner Cherwin stated he thought that Shelter Inc. was a good organization and they were tasked with a difficult job. The number of police calls were just part of what this type of facility entailed; it did not mean that Shelter Inc. was a bad operator. He supported the mission of Shelter Inc. but questioned whether the subject property was an appropriate location for their use. The charge of the Plan Commission was to look at the specific characteristics of the facility relative to the specific characteristics of the location in which it was proposed. He felt that the number of police calls would be disruptive to the surrounding neighbors, regardless of whether the nature of the calls were more serious or more innocuous. He did not believe the proposal would meet the requirements for special use permit or for variation approval, although he was open to new evidence provided at the public hearing or a different perspective provided by the surrounding neighborhood. He was not convinced that the subject property was the right spot for the proposed facility, regardless of how important the mission of Shelter Inc. was.

Commissioner Green agreed with Commissioner Cherwin. He clarified that it wasn't that he found the nature of the organization unnecessary, but that in the context of this location, he had concerns about the proposal.

Commissioner Jensen stated that he agreed with many of the points raised by Commissioner Cherwin and Commissioner Green. He asked if this location was not suitable, then what location would be suitable? If it was not suitable in the proposed residential area, then would the Village be saying that there was no residential area where this project could be feasible? Was the message that they should not be located in a primarily residential area? What location in Arlington Heights would be appropriate for this type of facility?

Commissioner Green recalled the Hearts Place project on Boeger Road, which was not a dense R-3 neighborhood. He

envisioned that a similar location might be suitable for a project like Shelter Inc.

Commissioner Cherwin added that the Boeger Road location was similar to the property where Shelter Inc. is currently located. He was not aware of substantial complaints about the current location, so he guessed that it was not as disruptive to surrounding neighbors. The current location was close to the shopping and amenities as desired by Shelter Inc, but did not have the same adverse effect of being detrimental to surrounding neighbors. He envisioned locations like that to be a good fit for this type of use.

Commissioner Sigalos pointed out that the Boeger Road facility, while not close to single-family homes, put a neighboring daycare out of business, so even though it wasn't in a single-family neighborhood it had an impact on surrounding properties.

Mr. Bea asked if the Commissioners had driven by the Valley Lane location. If they were to drive by the location, they would have a different sense of being right in the middle of a single-family neighborhood. The location was the second house in from a busy street and at the very edge of the neighborhood. He thought that the Plan Commission should think about what they were saying to young people if they were to place them off in a commercial area, rather than helping them to learn to live in a residential area.

Commissioner Green stated that he understood the mission of Shelter Inc., but also had to take into consideration the residents in the neighborhood who worked their entire lives to buy their houses. There were two sides to the argument.

Mr. Bea said that the Committee had stated the other side very well, and that Shelter Inc was there to present their side of things. He pointed out that this was a good compromise location in that it was at the edge of a residential neighborhood. Directly behind the subject property was a Chase Bank, which was a potential employer for the residents. He asked for an opportunity to address the specific conditions of approval.

Commissioner Green encouraged the committee to move forward with discussion of other projects that they needed to discuss that evening.

Mr. Bea asked that the record reflect that they met all criteria for approval and were prepared to explain how they met each criteria.

Commissioner Green asked if the committee needed to hear the explanation at the Conceptual Plan Review Committee level.

Commissioner Cherwin said that he didn't need to hear it right now, but that they would need to meet the criteria for approval at the Plan Commission or else the project wouldn't be approved. This was not the necessary venue to discuss the criteria for approval. He thought that Commissioner Green was trying to have sufficient time to discuss another project and also open up the floor for public comment.

Mr. Hubbard agreed that the individual criteria for special use approval will be deliberated at the Plan Commission and did not need to be discussed this evening. In an effort to move the Shelter Inc. project forward, he encouraged the committee to open up the next item for discussion and then open up for public comment.

Public Comment:

Mr. Moens asked why there would be discussion of the project after a decision had already been made. He was not sure why a discussion would need to occur, unless the project had to proceed to the Plan Commission regardless of the discussion outcome. Relative to the project, he felt that concerns on the location was a NIMBY cop-out. He encouraged the commission to step back and take a look at the whether the assumption of reduced property values high frequency of police calls was realistic. He believed that these were just suppositions. He asked that people analyze the proposal with an open mind and supported giving the petitioner a chance to establish their facility on the subject property.

Mr. Wichmann stated that he believed that facility should not refer to their residents as youths given that their ages would be between 17.5 and 21. He felt that these were adults. He said that many of the individuals who wrote in support of the proposal did not live in the Ivy Hill neighborhood. The facility was proposed in a residential neighborhood, not a commercial neighborhood, which was different from where their facility was located presently. He felt that Shelter Inc. had a documented the impact of the program to those that were part of the program, but did not address their impact to the surrounding neighborhood. He was supportive of the neighborhood meeting and hoped that it would be for the immediate neighbors of the proposed facility and not for people that didn't live in the vicinity of the project.

Mr. Marsillo said that he lived in the Ivy Hill neighborhood and was the parent of a child with special needed who still lived at home. He stated that the facility was not a group home. There were already group homes in the Ivy Hill neighborhood. The proposed facility did not include enough parking spaces and he worried about the impact on the neighborhood. He thought that Shelter Inc. should look into more of a dormitory setting that was situated in an institutional area not a residential neighborhood.

Recommendation

The Conceptual Plan Review Committee outlined their concerns with the project during the meeting discussion and said that they would review of the project should it advance to the Plan Commission.

Bruce Green, Chair
CONCEPTUAL PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE
Sam Hubbard, Recorder