

ALBION BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS - REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
January 15, 2020 - Albion Municipal Building

ROLL CALL AND DETERMINATION OF QUORUM: Upon determining a quorum was present, the meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by President Scott Cole. Members present for the public hearing were: Dave Bremer, Dave Dunn, Scott Cole, Mark Hunter, Lori Gagen was absent. Also present were Town Manager Tena Woenker, the applicants, Steve Smith & Felicia Patrick and many members of the public who came in support of the project.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: The Pledge of Allegiance to the U.S. Flag was recited by all present.

MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING: A motion was made and seconded (Bremer/Dunn) to approve the June 19, 2019 minutes. Motion carried by a 4-0 vote.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Cole asked for nominations for the chairman position, Hunter made motion to keep Scott Cole as Chair Bremer seconded, all voted in favor; Hunter nominated as Vice Chair by Bremer, Dunn seconded, all voted in favor; Hunter nominated Lori Gagen to continue as secretary, Dunn seconded, all in favor 4-0.

NEW BUSINESS:

Public Hearing

Special Use 2020-01 Noble House Ministries intends to sell property to Serenity House and seeks a Special Use Variance to operate a men's recovery home in a house zoned for industrial purposes per the new Albion Zoning Ordinance of January 1, 2020.

Cole called the hearing to order at 6:09. Danyel Wagner explained that Noble House Ministries is unable to maintain both houses (Noble and Pilot House) and has been working with Serenity House to add more services locally for the men in need of recovery programming. She explained that Pilot House is more for shelter but not recovery. Steve Smith of Serenity House presented next. He gave their history, including they are 25 years old providing clean, structured, sober living for men in recovery. They have 6 houses serving this purpose, both for men and women. He explained the system and how they help people become stable and productive. He said they work closely with law enforcement and do not take any sexual offenders or homeless. The criteria is strictly for those with addiction problems.

Felicia Patrick, director of Noble House, said the Pilot House was purchased in 2006 and did well but recently has had financial hardship. This change would help Noble House return their focus to women and children and Serenity House would not be directly affiliated with them. The property has been in the industrial zoning and had a variance approved previously so they could fulfill their mission.

Steve Bade, VP of Serenity House, said he has spoken to several people who have maintained sobriety for years who have offered to help Serenity House locally with their programs and would support their mission. The director of the Serenity House in Auburn, told the BZA about the strength of their program. Becky Calhoun, of Drug Free Noble County spoke about the need for consistent recovery homes and spoke in support of Serenity House to help people come to terms with their recovery. She said Serenity House has assisted her when needed even though they haven't had a presence in Noble County.

Susan Kamara, Northeastern Center, also gave a recommendation for Serenity House.

Justin Diehm, adjacent property owner, asked how many people live in the home. About ten is the answer, Smith said. Diehm said they have not had any issues with the men in Pilot House but he is happy they have more structure for the residents through Serenity House programs.

Matt Rawles, a neighbor to Pilot House and he also is happy the Serenity House would be taking over with more programming.

Hunter asked if Pilot House is solely a men's shelter. Wagner explained that after the meth epidemic came about the focus changed a little by adding recovery to the shelter. Changing to Serenity House will narrow the focus.

Cole asked about parking, Smith said that many of the men carpool but down the road he would be willing to make a parking area if the acre of land can support that. Cole asked about the length of time the Pilot House has had the variance to have the shelter. Patrick said she thought the first variance must have been around 2006 when the house was purchased.

Cole asked about the average length of stay - 9 months. Smith said about 75% of the residents would be recommended by community corrections, or probation. Drug court is already involved. He could not answer about the rate of recidivism - but he said about 50% finish the program. A senior house resident will be assigned duties to cover if the manager isn't on site.

Dunn expressed concern about the lack of sidewalk to town for those without a vehicle to walk along State Road 8. Diehm said the sidewalk has been discussed and the back parking lot is a good idea.

Cole said the back area has not been maintained well in the past few years and this change could improve it. He also asked about capacity, Smith said the room has 7 bunk beds and two other rooms that make 11 beds. Cole said he would be concerned if they have 30 beds but they said there would be no more than 15 men in a house.

Jan Diehm said she was concerned about the yard upkeep but isn't concerned after hearing the conversation.

Cole asked but there were no more comments. Closed the public meeting at 6:42.

Finding of Facts

A finding of fact was voted on by each line item, and most were found to be in favor with the exception of #3, is the special use permitted in Industrial Heavy zoning. The answer was no but all agreed the usage has not been an issue under the previous variance.

Roll Call votes revealed that the application was approved by (4) ayes, and (0) nays.

Adjournment:

There being no further business on the agenda, a motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Hunter, and seconded. Meeting adjourned at 6:20 PM.

Scott Cole, BZA President

Tena Woenker, Secretary