

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

MINUTES OF THE HEALTH, HOSPITALS & SOCIAL SERVICES PUBLIC HEARING AND COMMITTEE MEETING, SEPTEMBER 21, 2015

PRESENT

Steven Froot
Michael Heller
Karen Pesce
Beverly Fettman
Lenora Croft
Julia Gomez
Lisa Daub
David Gellman
Donald Lash
Rebecca Maitin
Rolando Aquino
Yesenia Estrella
Linda McCauley
Wendell Alexis
Elizabeth Thompson
John Sims
Denis O'Flynn
Elizabeth O'Flynn
Patrick O'Flynn
Hannah McAllister
Kouli Nalpantidis
Eliot Malone
Elpitha Hope Nalpantidis Malone
Daryl & Tammi Cambrelen
Kennedy & Mary McDonnell

AFFILIATION

Committee Chair
CB 8 - Committee member
CB 8 - Committee member
CB 8 - Committee member
CB 8 - Committee member
Community Committee Member
CB 8
CB 8
Sinergia Inc.
Sinergia Inc.
Sinergia Inc.
Sinergia Inc.
NYS OPWDD
Montefiore Hospital
KHNIA
Neighbor
Neighbor
Neighbor
Neighbor
Neighbor
Neighbor
Neighbor
Neighbor
Neighbors
Neighbors

PUBLIC HEARING

The public hearing was called to order at 7:10 p.m. at the William E. Irwin, Jr. American Legion Post 774, located at 3035-37 Corlear Avenue (between West 230th-231st Streets), Bronx, New York 10463.

The Chair welcomed all in attendance and explained that the first part of this meeting is a public hearing, convened pursuant to the Padavan Law, to consider the establishment of an Individual Residential Alternative ("IRA") at 3016 Corlear Avenue, between West 230th and 231st Streets, proposed by Sinergia Inc. The Notice of Public Hearing provided as follows:

Sinergia Inc. plans to establish a 24-hour supervised Individual Residential Alternative (IRA) for three (3) intellectually and developmentally disabled adults at 3016 Corlear Avenue, between West 230th--231st Streets, Bronx, NY 10463. The group home is under the supervision of the NYS Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD).

The Board office mailed a hearing notice and invitation to speak at the meeting to residents of Bronx Community Board 8 residing in the vicinity of the subject property and the entire Community Board mailing list.

Sinergia was represented by its Executive Director, Donald Lash; its Deputy Director, Yesenia Estrella; its Director of Residential Services, Rebecca Maitin; and its Assistant Director of Residential Services, Rolando Aquino. Ms. Linda McCauley, of the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (“OPWDD”), was also in attendance.

The representatives of Sinergia provided information about their organization, the proposed IRA at 3016 Corlear Avenue, the property itself, and other IRAs operated by Sinergia in NYC. The residents selected to live in the proposed IRA at 3016 Corlear Avenue would be three intellectually and developmentally disabled female adults, two of whom, ages 54 and 64, have already been identified. The individual to be selected for the third bedroom will be screened for compatibility and similar needs to the other residents. The prospective residents have previously resided in group home settings in New York City with non-24-hour supervision, but with advancing age require full-time staffing. The proposed IRA will be supervised on a 24-hour basis, with staff assisting residents with meal preparation and other activities of daily living, helping them to be as independent as possible. Residents will attend a day habilitation program run by Sinergia in Manhattan; transportation will be provided by van to and from the day program. A care plan for each resident is reviewed every 6 months. The residence is not a “locked” facility. The individuals who will reside here have never lived in or required a restrictive setting, and do not present a danger to themselves, to staff or to neighbors. Residents will have the opportunity to have visitors, including friends and family. It is not anticipated that clinicians and other service providers will visit the home. Direct support staff generally use public transportation to get to the IRA.

The proposed site is a three-bedroom single family home at 3016 Corlear Avenue, on a primarily residential block between West 230th and 231st Streets. Sinergia is leasing the entire property, which is owned by an occupant of a neighboring dwelling. There are front and rear patios, but no driveway. Few modifications to the property are required, and none of the residents is expected to use a wheelchair. If an individual using a wheelchair moved into the residence, additional modifications would be required, such as eliminating front steps, widening doorways and retrofitting the downstairs bathroom.

Sinergia currently operates approximately 25 other residences, primarily apartments, serving 53 individuals at scattered sites in Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx. None of the IRAs operated by Sinergia house more than three individuals. The closest Sinergia-operated location to Community District 8 is an apartment in a multi-unit building located at 100 Mosholu Parkway. Sinergia has provided services to the disabled for 38 years and has provided residential services for 25 years.

Residents of the community who live near the proposed location were invited to speak at the hearing. Kennedy McDonnell (3014 Corlear), who owns the home next door to the proposed location, stated that he had previously leased his property to Special Citizens Futures Unlimited, another provider of supportive residential services in Community District 8, for some 15 years, although the property is not currently being used as an IRA. Mr. McDonnell questioned whether the proposed location at 3016 Corlear was suitable for a group residence, as compared with his property. He stated that the front deck of 3016 is over a gas main, that the property has no driveway or off-street parking and that expensive renovations and maintenance would have to be performed. Mr. McDonnell questioned the representatives of Sinergia as to the length of the lease (5 years), the monthly rent to be paid (the figure was not available at the hearing), whether Sinergia offered to purchase the property (the response was they had not), and whether Sinergia intends to increase the height of the building (they do not).

Hannah McAllister (3026 Corlear) asked about the nature of the residents' disabilities (formerly referred to as mental retardation) and inquired whether it was expected the residents would be moved to other locations in the near term (the intention is that the residents will age in place). Denis O'Flynn (owner of 3022 & 3031 Corlear) asked whether the hearing was a formality if the lease had already been signed, and it was explained by Mr. Lash that the procedure is to present the Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) with a signed lease before approaching the Community Board for approval. Mr. O'Flynn also inquired about whether the residents might be a danger to the community, asked if staff will sleep at the residence (there are three shifts, so staff do not sleep at the location) and asked for information about the education, training and screening of the staff.

Messrs. Lash and Aquino explained Sinergia's use of background checks for staff and reference to state social service registries. A neighbor, Hope Malone (3018 Corlear), added that the screening of such workers by OPWDD normally takes three months. Health, Hospitals & Social Services (HHSS) Committee Community Member Julia Gomez, who has a background in supportive housing in NYC, agreed that New York State required both a lease and an identification of the prospective residents before allowing a proposed location to be presented to the Community Board, explained that the type of residents selected for this IRA were not violent, just unable to live on their own without supervision, and addressed the issue of staff training. HHSS member Mike Heller stated that in his experience individuals with developmental/intellectual disabilities pose no danger to the community. Mr. Heller, who is the Chair of Community Board 8's Traffic & Transportation Committee, also pointed out that group homes typically have lower vehicle density than typical single family homes because no vehicles are associated with the home and often vans from off-site (in this instance, based in Manhattan) are used to transport residents. CB 8 member David Gellman asked the Sinergia representatives questions about the nature of the staffing at the location and whether any supervisors or health professionals would be visiting the location on a regular basis. To HHSS member Karen Pesce's question as to what would happen if a resident's physical functioning declines, Mr. Lash indicated that the policy is not to transfer residents to other locations any more frequently than is absolutely necessary.

The Chair raised the issue of whether it would be advantageous to establish a Community Advisory Board. Sinergia representatives stated their willingness to do so if there was interest on the part of neighbors. There were no volunteers at the time of the hearing. The Chair, with the assistance of Mr. Heller, displayed an interactive Google Map maintained by the Community Board to demonstrate the extent to which social service facilities and group residences were located in the vicinity of 3016 Corlear Avenue. The map depicted the following two IRA or IRA/ICF locations in the immediately surrounding area:

- a group home/intermediate care facility operated by the Federation Employment & Guidance Services at 2782 Johnson Avenue (approximately four blocks west) for 10 mentally retarded/developmentally disabled adults; and
- a group home operated by Advocates for Services for the Blind/Multihandicapped at 3234 Tibbet Avenue (approximately four blocks north) for 6 mentally retarded/developmentally disabled adults.

The public hearing concluded at approximately 8:30 pm.

COMMITTEE MEETING

Minutes

The minutes of the following past HHSS meetings were unanimously approved by the members present: Nov. 17, 2014; December 15, 2014; April 20, 2015; May 18, 2015 and June 15, 2015.

Resolution

The proposal to establish a group residence at 3016 Corlear Avenue was discussed. The Committee approved a resolution to recommend that the Board vote to approve the establishment of the proposed IRA, by the following vote: 5 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions.

In Favor – Board members: L. Croft, S.Froot, M.Heller, K. Pesce
Community Committee Member: J. Gomez

Chair's Report

Mr. Froot handed out to Committee members in attendance copies of recent news reports regarding the Legionnaires' Disease outbreak, progress in reducing obesity in young people, the use of heroin by students in local schools, and the role bodegas can play in encouraging health eating. He also distributed a fact sheet about Legionnaires' Disease, a report by the NYC Budget Office about the effect of the level of funding for antismoking efforts on rates of cigarette smoking, a report on underage drinking in NYC, an announcement of a new grant to Bronx Health REACH and a list of currently pending legislation in the City Council. The Chair suggested that the Committee discuss these items, as well as new business, at the next meeting, when several new Committee members will be in attendance.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:15 p.m.

The Committee will hold its next meeting at 7:30 PM on Monday, October 19, 2015 at the Board Office.

Prepared by Steven Froot and Karen Pesce
Approved by Steven Froot, Chair
Health, Hospitals & Social Services Committee