

**MINUTES OF THE HEALTH, HOSPITALS AND
SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
HELD ON DECEMBER 11, 2006
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
RIVERDALE YM/YWHA
5625 ARLINGTON AVENUE**

PRESENT

AFFILIATION

Martin Katzenstein	Committee Chair CB #8
Robert Abbott	CB #8
Robert Bender	CB #8
Anthony Creaney	CB #8
Thomas Durham	CB #8
Beverly Fettman	CB #8
Philip Friedman	CB #8
Damian McShane	CB #8
Joyce Pilsner	CB #8
Todd Rubinstein	CB #8
I.W. Stone	CB #8
Martin Wolpoff	CB #8
Joseph E. Gordon	Councilmember, G.O. Koppell
Holli Rubiano	Special Citizens
Matthew Boulay	Community Resident
Sari Simmons	Special Citizens
Jonathan Hakala	Special Citizens
Catherine Boulay	Community Resident
Peter Boulay	Community Resident
Candice M. Giove	Riverdale Review
Margaret Yang	Community Resident
Harnng Shen	Community Resident
Margaret Buczynske	Special Citizens
Karen Wasserman	Special Citizens – Parent
Sheldon Lewis	Special Citizens – Parent
Sheila Lewis	Special Citizens – Parent
Bonnie Hiller	Special Citizens – Parent and Board President
Gerri Zatlow	Special Citizens - Exec. Dir.
Wafa Abboud	Special Citizens – Director of Waiver Svcs.
Anita Zatlow	Special Citizens

Establishment of a New Group Home at 5431 Fieldston Road:

Applicant: Special Citizens Futures Unlimited, Inc.

Original Notice Date: 9/29/06 (recommendation vote extended past the 40 day limit by ‘Special Citizens’ to accommodate H & H committee hearing)

Anyone wishing to speak during the hearing needs to sign in prior to meeting start. Each speaker will be allocated 3 minutes.

Committee chairman reads portion of state law pertaining to placement of care facilities and that only ‘need’ or ‘over saturation’ are acceptable reasons to vote against a proposed facility.

A committee recommendation vote will occur at the end of public hearing for consideration by the full community board the following evening (12/12/06).

DVD:

- Special Citizens Futures Unlimited, Inc. plays a DVD describing and showing its facilities and programs (including Value Plus Shop on Riverdale Avenue). Residents, parents of residents and staff are interviewed (first home operated by ‘Special Citizens’ opened in 1981).
- Due to increasing rate of diagnosis for autism, there is a growing need for homes and placement of autistic adults.

‘Special Citizens’ Executive Director:

- Has 43 year old brother with autism.
- The proposed home on Fieldston Road would be the 7th home operated by ‘Special Citizens’.
- In addition to 24/7 care homes, ‘Special Citizens’ also has several other programs ranging from family support, vocational training of autistic adults, etc.
- ‘Special Citizens’ only services clients with a primary diagnosis of autism and may have secondary diagnosis ranging from retardation, bi-polar and/or manic-depression.
- ‘Special Citizens’ wants to establish another home in Riverdale due to it being a welcoming community, considers Riverdale as its home where it has operated for the past 21 years.
- There will be (7) residents at the proposed home. Residents have to be pre-selected prior to home establishment. One of proposed residents currently lives in Riverdale, the other (6) residents are from other areas in the Bronx and Manhattan.
- Proposed residents of new home would work in the various stores ‘Special Citizens’ operates in Riverdale.
- ‘Special Citizens’ has a long staff retention in all its facilities (low staff turnover).
- Welcomes the public to come and visit any of their facilities.
- New facility to be staffed with (3) staff members + (1) supervisor during the day and (2-3) staff members at night.
- Committee Member Questions to ‘Special Citizens’ representatives:
- ‘Special Citizens’ clarifies an error in a letter they submitted to CB8; they operate (3) homes within Riverdale and the new home proposed would house (7) residents.
- As described at a previous H & H Committee meeting, the proposed house has a combined sewer system with the adjacent house 5433 Fieldston Road. The sewer line enters a DEP line which has been damaged causing water backup into the houses.
 - ‘Special Citizens’ had brought an engineer, architect and sewer specialist to examine the problem. Additionally they had the sewer line examined via video scoping which located a large rock obstructing the exit of the house sewer line into the DEP sewer.
 - Engineer suggested installing a flapping door at the end of the house sewer line to prevent backflow into the house from the DEP sewer. ‘Special Citizens’ is willing to make this repair in lieu of splitting/replacing the existing line which would prevent backflow into both houses.
 - ‘Special Citizens’ will provide name of engineer, recommendation and DEP authorizations for work to the community board.
- The house has a total of (6) bedrooms; (3) large bedrooms, (3) regular sized bedrooms and (3) bathrooms. The bedrooms to be reconfigured for each resident to have own bedroom.
- ‘Special Citizens’ does not believe the proximity of highway is a concern. All home residents will be supervised 24/7. All doors to facility will have alarms to indicate someone entering/leaving. None of the proposed residents are “runners.”

Committee chairman expresses continued concern with respect to proposed home proximity to Henry Hudson Parkway entrance.

Public Hearing Speakers (limited to 3 minutes each)

Speaker 1 (Adjacent Homeowner 5433 Fieldston Road):

- Discusses Padavan Law and term ‘over saturation.’
- Mentions three other homes within ¼ mile of proposed location and that other cities separate homes 1-1/2 miles apart.
- Is opposed to placement of home at proposed location.

Speaker 2 (Adjacent Homeowner 5433 Fieldston Road):

- Describes her interpretation of Community Board’s responsibility in providing a recommendation (for-or-against) this home.
- Discusses how her house and the 5431 Fieldston house are equipped with a shared sewer which has backed-up with rain water in the past due to a large rock within the line.
- The two houses, 5433 & 5431 share one Certificate of Occupancy and reside on one zoning lot. (zoning lot 1352).
- The 5431 house had an illegal conversion of the garage and cellar areas into living space(s).
- Hands out folders to committee members with several documents pertaining to her arguments.

H & H Chairman reads an excerpt from the Padavan Law since some speaker comments may be outside the scope of the H & H committee recommendation consideration.

Per ‘Special Citizens’:

- All staff is carefully screened with background checks and finger printing; after completion of training minimum salary is \$11/hr with medical (no employee contribution), life, dental.
- Long staff retention.
- Not minimum wage, untrained workers.

Speaker 3 (Parent of Autistic Young Adult):

- Parent of 22 year old with autism and is a resident in one of ‘Special Citizens’ other homes.
- Describes long waiting list to find placement into a home; need to start search 4-5 years prior to need.

Speaker 4 (Parent of Autistic Young Adult):

- Has an 18 year old son with autism at facility upstate. Son will return to NYC at age 21 when funding for care changes (age threshold.)
- Supports opening of residence on Road.

Speaker 5 (Parent of Autistic Young Adult – Husband of Speaker #2):

- Son was diagnosed with autism.
- Autism is a multi-system/multi-medical disorder.
- Further defines autism as a social/communication disability.
- Rate of autism appears to be increasing and more facilities needed to care for these adults.

Speaker 6 (Parent of Autistic Young Adult and President of the Board of Special Citizens):

- Son has lived at the Corlear home operated by ‘Special Citizens’ for (7) years.
- Same three staff members today tending to her for those (7) years.
- Supports formation of new home on Fieldston Road.
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Responses to questions to ‘Special Citizens’ by Committee Members:

- Approximate house price is \$800K; to be 80% federally funded and 20% state funded.
- House within group’s price range, attractive, ‘home-like’ with a good layout.
- ‘Special Citizens’ has not approached federal/state agencies yet for funding; waiting result of community board recommendation vote.
- Gates would be installed around the house, mostly to keep people from trespassing than to keep residents in (a situation of trespassing at another group home described.)

Speaker 7 (Neighbor from 5500 Fieldston Road):

- Speaks with Family (wife and two children).
- Family moved to Riverdale 4 years ago; attracted to community feel.
- Observed a flyer approximately one week ago depicting negative opinion of care facility moving onto the block. He and family disagrees with flyer’s opinion and thinks that most neighbors would be welcoming of facility.
- Welcomes home onto block; exclusion of home goes against community feeling which originally attracted him to Riverdale.

Speaker 8 (Treasurer for Special Citizens):

- Not paid for services as treasurer; does not have an Autistic relative associated with the group.
- Assures that Special Citizens is a good agency and good neighbor.
- Fiancée has similar concern as speaker #1 & 2; will be living next to proposed care facility in Brooklyn. He determined the proposed facility is a reputable organization who has demonstrated to be a good neighbor which has diminished his and fiancée’s concern.

General Comments by ‘Special Citizens’:

- Restated that the (7) proposed residences of the proposed new home would all have the primary diagnosis of Autism and several with the secondary diagnosis of retardation (IQ’s below normal range.)
- There are approximately 149 individuals living within group homes in CB8 (approximate population of CB8 is 100,000+.)

Health, Hospitals & Social Services Recommendation Vote (To Support Establishment of home and review of appropriateness of house):

- 11 in Favor
- 0 Opposed
- 0 Abstentions

Full board meeting tomorrow night (12/12/06) where full board vote will be taken.

Meeting Adjourns

Submitted by,

Philip Friedman
Health, Hospitals & Social
Services Committee