



Chairperson , Martha Taylor

*The City of New York
Borough of Queens*

Community Board 8

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District Manager, Marie Adam-Ovide

**INFORMATIONAL
HEARING:**

**Special Citizens Futures Unlimited (SCFU)
Proposed Specialized Individual Residential Alternative
84-40 150th Street
Briarwood, NY 11435**

DATE: Thursday, June 2, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

PLACE: Community Board 8 Office
197-15 Hillside Avenue
Hollis, NY 11423

ATTENDANCE: Kevin Forrestal, Area 3 Chair
Allen Eisentein, CB8 Board Member
Bithihara-Martha Fulton, CB8 Board Member
Jessica Zufall, Chief Executive Officer, SCFU
Zelda Keaton, Senior Director of Programs, SCFU
Xian Edwards, Director of Residential Services, SCFU
Pravin Mascarenhas, Chief Programs Officer, SCFU
Larry Domenech representing OPWDD
Masis Sarkissian representing Councilman Rory Lancman
Marie Adam-Ovide, CB8 District Manager
Jatnna Pimentel, CB8 Staff Member

Purpose of Meeting:

As provided in Section 41:34 of the Mental Hygiene Law, formal notification of the interest and intent of Special Citizens Futures Unlimited (SCFU) under the auspices of the New York State Office For People With Developmental Disabilities to establish a community residence for four (4) developmentally disabled persons at the above address. This is a 24-hour Supervised Individual Residential Alternative (IRA) for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Area 3 Chair, Kevin Forrestal, called this Informational Hearing to order at 7:30 p.m. He explained that Area 2 Chair, Seymour Schwartz was unable to attend the meeting and he is chairing it in his absence.

He welcomed everyone to the hearing and asked everyone to indtroduce themselves. There were two (2) Board Members present. He explained the process and the purpose of this meeting. This is an informational hearing only. There will be no vote taken at this meeting and there will be no vote taken at the Community Board 8 Board Meeting being held on June 8, 2016 at the Hillcrest Jewish Center, located at 183-02 Union Turnpike.

Mr. Forrestal explained Community Board 8's stand on Community Residences. The Board has taken the stand that it will not vote on any type of health facility that wants to move into our community as it relates to the "Padavan Law" for the following reasons:

1. **Saturation/Concentration** has never been defined under the New York's Site Selection Law.
2. Finding the applicant an alternate site is almost impossible.
3. State law is in conflict with the Federal ADA guidelines.

Kevin Forrestal – If we had a vote and we denied this facility then we would have an obligation to find another location within the same community. Therefore, we do not feel we have a right or justification to say don't put it here. Normally on variances and things like that, we take a position and vote. When it comes to a Community Residence of this type, we take no position. If you have issues in the future please let us know and we will coordinate with the agency.

Mr. Forrestal asked that one of the representative from Special Citizens Futures Unlimited (SCFU) make an opening statement on their plans on the proposed site.

Jessica Zufall – She is the Chief Executive Office for SCFU. She explained that for over forty years SCFU has been supporting adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders. SCFU operates group homes and day habilitation programs. They are seeking to operate one of these sites in Queens.

She introduced her team. Xian Edwards is the Director of Residential Services, Larry Domenech is a representative from the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), Zelda Keaton is the Senior Director of Programs and Pravin Mascarenhas is the Chief Program Officer.

Mr. Forrestal asked the Board Members if they had any comments/questions for the applicants.

Allen Eisenstein – Mr. Eisenstein stated that he is in favor of the proposed group home. He is very familiar with the property, he just wished they would take care of it and make it look nicer.

Jessica Zufall – She stated that they were in the process of signing the lease and they were unable to maintain the property. They had someone clean the lawn last week and they will routinely clean and maintain the property.

Xian Edwards – Mr. Edwards mentioned that they will always keep the property in good condition since they are audited by the State. If the individuals are going to live in this house they will provide the best quality [of care].

Bithihara-Martha Fulton –
What is the condition of the inside of the house?
Answer: [Xian Edwards] – It is very nice.

Bithihara-Martha Fulton –
Was it empty for a long time?
Answer: [Jessica Zufall]- It was, but it was renovated. It has hardwood floors throughout, pretty neutral paint. One of the things we like about this house is that it is barrier free and we are going to have people with wheelchairs. The property has a wheelchair ramp as well.

Allen Eisenstein –
How many bathroos are on the property?
Answer: [Zelda Keaton] – The property has four (4) bathrooms.

Allen Eisenstein –

Are they all full bathrooms?

Answer: [Zelda Keaton] – No. There is one (1) with a shower, two (2) full bathrooms and one (1) with a washer.

Allen Eisenstein –

Are they wheelchair accessible?

Answer: [Zelda Keaton] – Yes, the one with the shower.

Allen Eisenstein – Sounds like a good place.

Kevin Forrestal –

The (4) four individuals that will be living in this property, are they physically disabled?

Answer: [Jessica Zufall] – We work with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The people that will be living in this home have physical limitations as well. This group home will be occupied by four (4) men in their 20s and 30s.

Kevin Forrestal – Just for clarification, it was said that there will be a minimum of two (2) persons at any time to assist them. They will also have a van for transportation and individuals will attend a day program and activities during the evening.

Jessica Zufall – The people that we support residentially are never home during the day. They are either working or attend day programs.

Kevin Forrestal –

How many group homes do you have?

Answer: [Jessica Zufall] – We have a total of twenty (20) programs as of now. We are primarily in the Bronx, Westchester, Manhattan and now in Queens.

Public Participation

Richard Grimm (Resident) – Mr. Grimm stated that he is the direct neighbor on one side of the property. His house was built by his grandfather and it has been a one family house ever since. He knew the people that used to live in this property. They had a really nice garden. The owner was the founder of the Queens Botanical Garden. He stated that this home used to be rented to St. John's University students as well. He learned that SCFU are not the owners of the house, they are leasing it. He feels that this SCFU is going to change the occupancy of the property and the zoning.

Jessica Zufall – We will not change the zoning of the property. It will remain a single residential home.

Kevin Forrestal – Mr. Forrestal mentioned to Mr. Grimm that he lives across the street from St. John's University. In a personal opinion this will be an improvement of what has happened in the past. In addition, you have the advantage that this property will be regulated by a state organization and it will be well kept and maintained. He feels that the agency [SCFU] will do the right thing and there will be no issues with these individuals.

Scott Pamatat (Resident) – Mr. Pamatat stated that he has lived in Briarwood for 57 years. He stated that Mr. Grimm is his cousin. They always considered this neighborhood family orientated. He stated that he was surprised when he was notified that this property will be used as a group home. He visited the location. He stated that it is in very good condition on the inside. His major concern is the property values. He feels this is not the right place for this kind of people.

Allen Eisenstein – Mr. Eisenstein stated that he lives around the corner from this property. This group home is not going to affect your property value. Property values have never been affected by other locations where there are group homes. He stated that his property keeps going up in value. He assured the residents that there is not going to be an issue with property values in Briarwood as long as the group home is kept nice and clean.

Kevin Forrestal – (to Scott Pamatat) – Mr. Forrestal stated that the proposed site is a detached four (4) bedroom 3000 sq. ft. house that will be occupied by four (4) young men that will not cause any trouble. In the past, he worked for over twelve years (12) with a disability agency and he can assure that people with disabilities are the most caring and loving people he'll ever meet. He is sure that if he gets to know the individuals he will think the same. If they talk about this location six (6) months after this meeting, he guarantees that he will be delighted that these individuals are his neighbors.

Laura Grimm (Resident) – She stated that her sister was a medical social worker and took care of (240 twenty-four (24) emotionally disturbed physically handicapped boys for many years and she never had Difficulty. She agreed that small homes like these are the most effective at helping people with disabilities.

Kevin Forrestal – The concept is to create the greatest independence for people with challenges. They also have great abilities. The goal is to integrate them to the greatest extent possible into the community.

Marie Adam-Ovide (DM Adam-Ovide) – She informed the public that she is the District Manager for the Community Board. She stated that she and her staff will be the ones receiving complaints regarding group homes. She added that the Community Board has not yet received a complaint regarding a group home within Community Board 8. She stated that the Community Board does not vote for or against group homes. A letter is created and sent to the State stating what the Community Board expects from the agency. For example, maintaining the property (garbage clean-up, cutting the grass etc.).

Laura Grimm (Resident) –

How many organizations such as this organization are in Briarwood right now? What is the term of the lease? What happens at the end of that term?

Answer: [Kevin Forrestal] – All we know is that there is a good number of them. We do not know how many organizations are in Briarwood right now.

Where did you get that information from?

Answer: [Kevin Forrestal] – We presented it once before. The question about how many organizations there is, is not really with our review process. This is an informational hearing only.

Allen Eisenstein –

I know that the property is not occupied yet. Before the individuals move in, will you be installing smoke alarms?

Answer: [Jessica Zufall] – Yes, we will. [Xian Edwards] – We cannot start until we are certified by the State.

Allen Eisenstein – You have answered all my questions.

Jessica Zufall – (to residents) – Ms. Zufall stated that she understands that saturation is a concern to all the residents. She explained the process of obtaining a group home. Once they find a property that they are interested in, the address of the location is sent to the State and they do a saturation check. If is over saturated they do not use the property.

Philip Rasco is a resident who had signed up for speaking time but arrived late. He asked if he can say a few words. Mr. Forrestal asked that Mr. Rasco make a brief statement.

Philip Rasco (Resident) – Mr. Rasco stated that based on what he knows about law, residents of the community have no say in these type of community residences coming into their neighborhood. The only two (2) defenses they have is over saturation and the changing of the neighborhood’s culture or nature. To his understanding, before the community consider these homes, the sponsors are required to provide statistics about the neighborhood to the community. The sponsor gives that to the Community Board.

How do we know if there is over saturation?

Answer: *[Kevin Forrestal]* – No. That is not correct. We don’t know what over saturation is. I don’t mean to interrupt you sir but as you said, you came in late and this was all explained. If you want, I can speak to you after the meeting.

Philip Rasco (Resident) – Mr. Rosco stated that the problem is that they need some transparency as to what is being done to this home, from the time that it was sold or rented to the sponsor. They need to know that proper controls were taken and that the saturation levels were not exceeded.

Kevin Forrestal – Mr. Forrestal reiterated to Mr. Rosco that all this information was explained at the beginning of the meeting. He is willing to speak to him after the meeting to answer any questions he may have.

Philip Rosco (Resident) –

Can I just finish?

Answer: *[Kevin Forrestal]* – Yes.

Philip Rasco (Resident) – Mr. Rosco stated that this home could not have been in the worst place in their neighborhood. He stated that they have many children in the neighborhood, they have schools, daycares. This house is in the center of thousands of children and is not a good idea. He fears the danger of the children in Briarwood.

Jessica Zufall – *(to Philip Raso)*

How do people with Autism endanger children?

Answer: *[Kevin Forrestal]* to *[Philip Rasco]* – Sir, you came in late and I let you speak. If you have any other questions, I’ll answer them after the meeting.

DM Adam-Ovide asked that the agency speak on Autism. She feels there is a misunderstanding as to what Autism is.

Jessica Zufall – Ms. Zufall stated that Autism is an intellectual and developmental disability. There are various ranges of functions, there is lower/higher functions. People with disabilities tend to function better than others on a daily basis. They do not support pedophiles, sex offenders, fire setters. These four (4) individuals are people that need help with daily living skills. Autism is a processing disorder, how people receive and process information which affects how they do things in their daily lives. For example, they support a man who is competetatively employed but needs help to get his day going. They support people that have no language and cannot speak at all. It is a very broad spectrum. There are no behavioral concerns associated with Autism.

Allen Eisenstein – Mr. Eisenstein stated that he does not think these four (4) individuals represent any danger to the community. He has been living in this community since the 70s, and there has never been any dangers to the community.

Laura Grimm (Resident) –

Can you give us an idea of what a day is like for these individuals on the weekend?

Answer: *[Jessica Zufall] – These individuals are very busy on the weekends. They have a house meeting about the activities they want to do. They go out to recreational programs. They have a normal life just like you and me.*

A resident inquired about a sewage pipe on the property that is next to his yard. Xian Edwards stated that the State still needs to go and inspect the property for feasibility checks. If this is an issue it will be taken care of.

Mr. Forrestal reminded the residents that whoever did not sign up for speaking time is not allowed to speak. DM Adam-Ovide asked that the resident email us evidence of the issue and the Community Board will follow-up with the agency and make sure the condition gets corrected.

Mr. Forrestal thanked everyone for coming. He hopes that some of their questions were answered.

Adjournment

Mr. Forrestal adjourned this meeting at 8:10 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,
Jatnna Pimentel, CB8 Staff Member
June 8, 2016*