



Chairman, Alvin Warshaviak

*The City of New York*  
*Borough of Queens*

**Community Board 8**

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District Manager, Marie Adam-Ovide

**INFORMATIONAL  
HEARING:**

**QSAC (*Quality Services for the Autism Community*)  
Community Residence  
84-10 Kent Street  
Jamaica Estates, New York**

**DATE:** **Thursday, August 20, 2015 at 7:30 p.m.**

**PLACE:** **Hillside Manor  
188-11 Hillside Avenue – Day Care Program Room  
Hollis, NY 11423**

**ATTENDANCE:** **Mark J. Lefkof, Area Chair  
Martha Taylor  
Cory Polshansky, Deputy Executive Director and COO, QSAC  
Marie Adam-Ovide, District Manager, CB8  
Alma Karassavidis, Staff member, CB8**

**Purpose of Meeting:**

As provided in Section 41:34 of the Mental Hygiene Law, formal notification of the interest and intent of QSAC (*Quality Services for the Autism Community*) under the auspices of the New York State Office For People With Developmental Disabilities to establish and operate an Individualized Residential Alternative for (8) eight adults with developmental disabilities at the above address. A site evaluation has been conducted by an independent architect and it has been determined that the site is suitable for use as a community residence.

Area Chair, Mark J. Lefkof, called this Informational Hearing to order at 7:30 p.m. He welcomed everyone to the hearing. 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 September 9, 2015 at the Hillcrest Jewish Center, located at 183-02 Union Turnpike.

Mr. Lefkof introduced Cory Polshansky, Chief Operating Officer of QSAC.

- QSAC stands for Quality Services for the Autism Community. We are a non-profit organization which serves approximately 2,000 individuals, children and adults throughout New York City and the outer boroughs.
- Established in 1970 by a group of parents whose founding members were from Jamaica Estates who had children with Autism.
- We operate several programs throughout Queens and the other boroughs of NYC as well as Nassau and Suffolk counties. We currently have 22 group homes and numerous apartments through Queens, Manhattan and Long Island.
- The proposed home that is being established at 84-10 Kent Street in Jamaica Estates is for young adults, age 21, who are aging out of residential schools and can no longer stay there. All of the residents are from Queens. They grew up in Queens and subsequently moved to a residential school. Their families also live in Queens. Three (3) of the eight (8) individuals were served, as children, by QSAC before they moved to a residential school. Now they are graduating at the age of 21 and returning back to their community.
- We have approximately 1,400 employees. This home would have 24 hour supervision, 7 days a week. Even when the individuals are asleep there would be two (2) staffers awake to supervise them.
- The individuals will attend a day habilitation program to learn vocational and pre-employment skills Monday to Friday. This is a program that we operate located in Queens Village. They would leave the house at approximately 7:45 a.m. and return at 3:30 p.m. They would participate in recreational activities in the evenings and on weekends several would go home to their families. Others would remain at the house and participate in weekend recreational activities.
- We offer the whole gamut of services from clinical to medical services. These services take place outside of the home. They go to primary care physicians in the community just like we do. There is a Nursing staff on hand to supervise my staff. The individuals do not have any medical issues. They are all diagnosed with Autism. Some have difficulties with communication and others need assistance with activities. They will be supervised at all times.
- We operate 22 homes and approximately 15 apartments. When the individuals graduate from the homes they move onto apartments that are less restrictive and more independent. We have several different levels of apartments that we operate. Many of the individuals that live in our apartments graduated from homes such as the one we are proposing.
- There is a lot of administrative oversight as far as supervision of the house:
  - Manager and Assistant Manager
  - Shift Supervisor
  - Program Coordinator (oversees Management Staff)
  - Clinical Director and Assistant Director
  - Program Director
- All administrative staff ultimately reports to me.
- We serve approximately 2,000 individuals from age one (1) in early intervention programs all the way to seniors. The individuals who are proposed for this house are in the mild to moderate range of functioning on the Autism spectrum.
- These individuals will frequent the community during activities but will be supervised at all times.
- I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

## **Board Member Comments and Questions**

Martha Taylor: Does QSAC run two other programs like this within CB8 but not within the Jamaica Estates area? Answer: No, not in CB8. We did a check on all facilities, not just homes for the developmentally disabled. There is not a home for at least 3/10 of a mile. We would not be able to proceed if we did not do a saturation check. I have been searching for a home for about 9 months and looked at over 85 homes before I found this one.

Mark J. Lefkof: There is a community facility on the westbound service road of the Grand Central Parkway between 188<sup>th</sup> Street and Chevy Chase Street. Are you aware of that? Answer: There were homes that came up on the list but they are at least 3/10 of a mile away. The barometer that NY State is using is a quarter of a mile. If it was within a quarter of a mile we would not develop it. We looked at 85 homes and half of them were disqualified because they were close to another facility. Whether it was a home for the developmentally disabled, foster care or substance abuse or various other populations that were served, we had to rule out those houses because they were too close in proximity to the house that we were looking to develop.

Mark J. Lefkof: What is the ratio of staff to clients? Answer: While they are awake, the ratio is 2:1. This house is proposed for eight (8) individuals so it would have a minimum of four (4) on staff if there are no issues or concerns. If someone was ill for example, I would have an extra staff person. If everything was status quo, there would be four (4) staff on duty while they were awake. At night while they are sleeping there would be two (2) staff on duty who would remain awake as well.

Mark J. Lefkof: At 7:30 a.m. you have four (4) staff present when they are awake, getting ready for breakfast, etc? Answer: Yes, at 6:30 a.m. we start with four (4) staff, the two (2) additional staff come in at 6:30 a.m. The staff leave their shift in the evening at about 10:30 p.m.

## **Public Participation**

Lauren Stransky, Resident of Jamaica Estates

I am more than just a little bit upset about this situation. I live directly across the street so my house looks over this house every day. It is a very small house. You are estimating at most, there will be twelve (12) people living there. Answer: Not living there, no. There will be staff members staying there while eight (8) others sleep? Answer: Not living there, they do not sleep there. Ok, so inhabiting the house at any one given time. That is a lot of people.

- Where will the staff members park their cars?
- How will we know if it's staff? How will we know if it is someone who doesn't belong there?
- Will they have security tags?
- Will there be a very transient staff coming in and out?
- I am very concerned for security reasons. There will be people that I don't know coming in and out of the house. Are there going to be vans parked in front of the house, or in and out of the driveway at all times of the day?
- How is the garbage going to be handled? Right now there is a family of five living across the street and they have four garbage cans at night. Twelve people living in that house at any given time, will produce lots of garbage. How is the sanitation going to be handled?
- You say there will be eight (8) residents now, but at any time could it be nine (9) or more? Is written permission necessary for others to be added?
- What is the mix between male vs. female? Is it a combination or is it going to be all male? I live alone across the street. There are young children next door.
- What are their exact ages?

Mark J. Lefkof: The initial ages of the residents are from 21-28. In 10 years they may be 31-38.

Lauren Stransky: We are setting up a terrible precedent right now. First of all, for allowing businesses like this into our neighborhood. This is a house, it's a residential neighborhood. Has it been zoned and given permission to run such a business? This has to have proper zoning. What is happening to the residential character of our neighborhood? You start here and then what? I am not a doctor or specialist in Autistic children, adolescents or adults. How do we know how they are going to be monitored? I am completely against it. I am absolutely distraught by it. If this goes through I am considering leaving the neighborhood. My security is at risk, my residence is at risk. The value of my home is at risk. Having a medical facility across the street from where I live does not belong in Jamaica Estates. Who is going to be paying for landscaping to keep the house looking like a residence? Is there going to be a sign outside with the name of the business? I am not against the good deed that you are doing for these adults, but it doesn't belong in our neighborhood.

Martha Taylor: Do you know how many group homes there are in Jamaica Estates? Do you know where they are located? Do you know how many there are in Holliswood? Do you know where they are located? You don't because none of the things you just suggested ever happened. There are no criticisms and no complaints about group homes. They have been in existence for over 30 years. The first one we had in CB8 was on Midland Parkway near Hillside Avenue. Did you know that?

Lauren Stransky: It doesn't matter. We have a beautiful block and we set the bar very high.

Martha Taylor: Jamaica Estates is filled with beautiful blocks and some of those blocks have group homes. This is not a business or a medical facility; it is a residence. According to ADA (*Americans with Disabilities Act*) you cannot turn down a home like this because it would be discriminatory. They have a right to have these houses. It is as-of-right. It cannot only be in one kind of neighborhood. It has to be in all different kinds of neighborhoods. Again, I would bet anything that you have no idea where the group homes are in Jamaica Estates. I understand your concerns but all of your concerns tell me that you don't know too much about group homes. Every one of your concerns have been addressed. We don't get complaints about group homes at the Community Board.

Karen Szlechter: You haven't addressed the issue as to whether or not it is legal?

Mark J. Lefkof: It is legal. It is as-of-right.

Martha Taylor: To turn them down would be in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Karen Szlechter: You are saying that there are eight (8) individuals that will be living there. This is a very small house.

Mark J. Lefkof: That is not for us to determine. That is determined by the State agency.

Martha Taylor: The State agency determines the number of people who can reside in these houses.

Mark J. Lefkof addressed the questions that were asked by the resident, Lauren Stransky.

How are your employees identified? How would someone know that they belong in the community and going to your facility? Answer: They do not wear a chain around their neck with an ID tag, so they are not going to be identifiable that way. They do carry a QSAC ID in their wallet which is required by our policy.

Mark J. Lefkof: Will the staff arrive in their own vehicles or take public transportation? Answer: They may do either.

Mark J. Lefkof: How will the garbage be handled? Answer: We have already been versed on everything that is required by the community. We know exactly when the garbage comes out. All the staff will be trained as we do with all of our homes. We will abide by all the rules and will not do anything different than any of our neighbors. We will be consistent with everyone in the community.

Mark J. Lefkof: What is the gender of the residents? Answer: All males.

Mark J. Lefkof asked Mr. Polshansky of QSAC to give a brief explanation of the levels of Autism for the residents of this home. Answer: Some individuals are verbal and can have conversation with you at length. Others have minimal verbal skills that use other types of communication systems, such as picture exchange communication systems where they point to pictures to communicate. Some have few words in their vocabulary and will use iPads and various other augmentative devices to communicate. Four (4) of the eight (8) are verbal and can articulate their wants and needs. They function in the moderate range of mental retardation. They have skills where they can prepare simple meals such as sandwiches and breakfast items. They do need assistance with preparing meals that require intricate cooking skills. All of the staff will assist them with cooking and cleaning. They will participate in their household chores like laundry and cleaning the house with assistance from staff. They are capable of performing their personal hygiene skills. Some need verbal skills and reminders, others need some physical prompts. Several are independent in some skills like tooth brushing, hand washing, etc.

Mark J. Lefkof: When a resident leaves the house are they accompanied or unaccompanied? Answer: They always have a staff person next to them.

Mark J. Lefkof: Even for just a walk around the block, a staff person is always with them? Answer: Yes 24/7/365.

Mark J. Lefkof: What about the landscaping? Answer: We have a landscaping company that handles other assignments within QSAC. They will landscape the property regularly on a weekly basis. We also have a maintenance department with over 20 staff members. If there is a problem with the interior or exterior of the residence, it would be addressed the very next day.

Mark J. Lefkof: How will snow removal be handled? Answer: We take care of our own snow removal. Our maintenance staff that I just mentioned, report to our various homes for snow removal. Snow removal is also part of the responsibility of the staff working at the homes.

Lauren Stransky: Have there been criminal background checks on the people that live and work there? Answer: Yes, everyone is fingerprinted. The fingerprints are run through a FBI database. It is done by NY State, not QSAC. Every employee is required by law (which was passed in 2006) to go through a fingerprint check and a more extensive background check as well. If they are arrested, we get an e-mail within 24 hours.

Pat Mitrofanis: I know that Autistic individuals are not necessarily violent, but there are many instances of them having violent episodes. What is the history of these residents as far as violent episodes? And if so, how are the staff members trained to handle that? I realize that it is a State decision to put eight (8) adults in this house but I cannot imagine how eight (8) adults can live in this house. I have been in this house. There are only three (3) bedrooms. Eight (8) adults plus four (4) staff members in that house seems extremely tight. That is probably the smallest house that I have seen in Jamaica Estates. That is a concern to me. When there is overcrowding in the house it usually spills over into the side and the back and I live directly behind this house. I understand it is as-of-right because it is ADA, but needless to say I do have concerns, because we are not used to this. It is all just families. We are not used to the community residence experience. Mark J. Lefkof: Which street do you live on? Answer: I live just around the corner on Radnor. The backyard of this residence is my side yard. Mark J. Lefkof: The second house off the corner on 188<sup>th</sup> Street and the Grand Central Parkway westbound Service Road is a community facility. It is the second house going west on the GCP Service Road of 188<sup>th</sup> Street. Pat Mitrofanis: Does that not violate the 3/10 of a mile rule? Answer: The closest house I mentioned was 3/10 of a mile. We cannot be within a quarter of a mile of another home.

Mark J. Lefkof: Somebody will have to measure it. It is close, however; this is a question we can ask the State.

Cory Polshansky: We also take into consideration when there are parkways and main roads; Hillside Avenue, Union Turnpike. When that divides the area, there are other parameters that are taken into consideration.

Mark J. Lefkof: Basically we are talking about less than 2 blocks. We will check it out. This is a very valid question. Do any of the potential clients for this house have a record of any violence? Answer: No. These people were chosen to live in this house because they are deemed appropriate for this house. There are many people who are referred to our facilities for potential placement. I must have looked at about 50-60 people. These are the most appropriate people. They do not have any history of violent behavior that was described earlier. Mark J. Lefkof: Are there any plans to do any renovations on the house? Answer: No, there are four (4) bedrooms in the house, not three (3) and they are adequate for two (2) people in each bedroom.

Mark Lefkof: The staff does not sleep in the residence. There is no facilities for the staff to sleep.

Basil Mitrofanis: That house belongs to a guy that lives one block north and he was renting that it. Was that house sold to QSAC or is it being rented to QSAC? Can they just up and leave or are they there for the long haul? As these eight (8) people get older and move out and others move in, will the same rigorous standards be held for everyone over the years.

Martha Taylor: Do they generally move out or do they stay there into old age? Answer: In general, they stay there until they die. When someone moves into a group home it is for life, unless they have a medical issue and are moved into a nursing home. This is not a temporary situation, whether they are going to this home or to any of our other homes. The population that we serve has difficulty with transition, so we try not to uproot them and move them because that would create issues for them.

Mark J. Lefkof: Are you purchasing the house? Answer: No, we are renting it. Right now we have a couple of years on the lease but we plan to renew it when it expires and continue to stay there.

Martha Taylor: Is there an option to buy? Answer: No, there is no option to buy in the lease. The owners are not looking to sell the house. The owners actually live across the street.

Martha Taylor: I have a question about the day program. They leave the house in the morning and they either go to work in whatever industry they have been trained in, or they go to get training. So as far as I can tell they are not sitting in the house all day. Is that right? Answer: Monday through Friday, the house will be empty during the day time from 8:00 a.m. to about 3:30 p.m. We have two vans situated at the house, which will park in the driveway. One of those 2 vans take the individuals to the program. There is no bus coming and going. The day program is operated by our organization. The vans are leased by our organization.

Basil Mitrofanis: What level of freedom do the eight (8) individuals have? There are eight (8) people and four (4) staff members. If three (3) people want to go for a walk, do three (3) of the staff go with them and then leave only one (1) inside?

Mark J. Lefkof: It is 2 to 1, so if one (1) person wanted to go then one (1) staff person would go. I would think then, based on the ratio, that if three (3) people want to go, then two (2) staff members would accompany them. Is that correct? Answer: It depends on the individuals. Some individuals do not require a 2 to 1 and can manage with 3 to 1. In some cases we would have one staff with 3, in others cases 2 staff with 3, depending on which individuals were going and which were staying.

Martha Taylor: Anyone going out to take a walk or whatever, would have supervision? Answer: Yes. When they do go out on various recreational activities, we have a minimum of 2 to 1. We schedule additional staff to go out on these activities as well. Walks in the community are something different and they would probably have two (2) staff going with them. When we go to recreational activities such as a movie and we have two (2) groups going in two separate vans, we have additional staff.

Mark J. Lefkof: Your proximity to Cunningham Park is close. You may take walks to Cunningham Park? Answer: A lot of our groups do go to Cunningham Park.

Lauren Stransky: Is the house alarmed at night? So that no one can get out? Answer: There would be an interior alarm that would alert the staff if anyone opened the door. We do not have any individuals with that history coming to this house. In 5 of our 22 homes we have a device that locks the door from the interior. In the case of the smoke detector system going off, it deactivates the door locks so that people could exit in case of a fire. We would install that if necessary, but we don't feel it is necessary for the individuals that are moving into this house. It is the same type of system that is often put in schools.

Karen Szlechter: I live right next door to the house. I have four little children who play outside all the time. They are children so they are noisy sometimes. Will that effect the residents in any way? Do they sit outside in the backyard? I am concerned about spill over. I am wondering if the noise from the children would be aggravating to them. I am concerned as to whether they would lash out in any way? Answer: They would not lash out. These are individuals that go into the community quite frequently. They are at the malls, the movie theaters, supermarkets. It's not as

if they have not already integrated with the community. All of them grew up in Queens with their families. They did the same things that you and I do in our lives. For one reason or another, the families could not take care of them. In some cases the parents became elderly or some of the families split up.

Karen Szlechter: Is this the first time they are living in a group home leaving their family home? Answer: No, they are not living with their families right now. They lived at residential schools. These schools have houses in a community or sometimes on a campus. They are in houses and have a school that they attend as well. They go out into the community. Some of them are coming from a residential school in Port Jefferson in Suffolk County. Others are coming from various locations throughout NY State and other states. The school districts that they were in paid other states to have them live in their residential schools. They have been acclimated to the community both when they were living in their homes and in their current environment. This is not new for them. They will transition just like anyone transitions to a new home. Are you adjacent to our driveway? Karen Szlechter: No I am on the other side of the bushes. Answer: Ok, so there is no opportunity for them to even be on that side of the house. Karen Szlechter: Well with kids the ball can go into the backyard. Answer: I am talking about the individuals moving into the house. There is nowhere on that side of the house for them to go to. Karen Szlechter: My biggest concern is security. Not only of the residents, but the staff. You mentioned that there are four (4) staff members. Is there a turnover? Is there a shift change? Answer: This is a full time staff. The typical staff person would work either Sunday to Wednesday or Wednesday to Saturday. For instance, you would have a person who works from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday and maybe 2:00 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. They are working in shifts, not 24/7. Karen Szlechter: The constant turnover of staff is also a concern because there will be people coming and going at all times. Answer: You are going to see the same people. There will be different shifts with different people but the same people will work the same hours. People work a specific consistent shift for their 4 or 5 days for their 40 hours a week.

Mark J. Lefkof: I don't know if there is a fence at the house or not. If there is no fence are you planning to put up any type of a fence? Answer: We could not put up a fence because there is a driveway where we will park our vehicles. Mark J. Lefkof: But you could put a fence on the other side of the driveway? Answer: No, the house is right there. If you want a fence, we will put up a fence. I just don't know anywhere that we could put up a fence. I have been at the property maybe 30 times already.

Mark J. Lefkof: Is there anything else you would like to say?

Martha Taylor: So your biggest concern is security? Karen Szlechter: Yes, not only of the residents, but the constant changeover of staff, the shifts. In that way there will be people coming and going at different hours.

Mark J. Lefkof: What is the turnover of your staff? Answer: I have over 1,400 employees. I have been there about 23 years. My staff varies, we are hiring new staff all the time. Some staff have been there for 20 years. Group homes have the lowest turnover rate in the agency. We do have turnover in some of the entry level positions where we are hiring people new to the field. During their training they may discover that this is not the field that they want to work in. We have some people with us for 10 years or longer.



Martha Taylor: Getting back to this fence. You are not on the driveway side of this property, you are on the other side. Is there a fence now dividing your property from that house? Karen Szlechter: Not a proper fence, there are bushes.

Cory Polshansky: Whatever our neighbors want, we will install at our cost. As long as Building Department codes allow it; we will install it. I do not see an area where we can install it, but if you want it, you can pick it out; I will purchase it and install it. Inside the folders I gave out, you will find my business card with my e-mail and my phone number.

Mark J. Lefkof: If you have a questions please coordinate it through the Community Board. Our District Manager, Marie Adam-Ovide will address any issues that come up.

Pat Mitrofanis: If something comes up when the residents are in the house. For example, if there is noise late at night or garbage strewn about, who do I contact? Or if I have an issue with a staff member? Answer: You should contact me and I guarantee I will respond immediately. I will address the problem and resolve it immediately. Pat Mitrofanis: I am on the other side in the back. There is no fence there now. We have huge cedar trees. I don't think I need the fence unless there is a problem, but if there is a problem later on, can I ask for the fence then. Answer: Absolutely. You just have to contact me and I will install it.

Mark J. Lefkof: You have one other question?

Lauren Stransky: How would you feel if this house was going next door to you?

Mark J. Lefkof: I would feel lucky and fortunate that my children and my grandchildren do not need it. These types of facilities have all been checked out. I would not have a problem with it. In fact I have found over the many years I have been on the Community Board, almost 38 years, we have never had an issue with any Community Facility that has been housed in Community Board 8. Once the facilities were opened, all the neighbors have never complained. In fact they say that they are better neighbors than some others. They know that the sidewalks will be shoveled, they know it will be cleaned and the house is not being run down.

Mr. Lefkof 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 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.

Mark J. Lefkof: 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, but put it there. Normally on variances and things like that, we take a position and vote. But when it comes to a Community Facility of this type, we take no position. We will help the community as we are doing tonight. If you have issues in the future please let us know and we will coordinate with the facility. It looks like the agency is willing to work with the community as best as they can.

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

## Adjournment

Adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

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District Manager contacted the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities regarding the distance of this site to the nearest group home. We were informed that as a matter of law, the mere number of similar residences or their proximity to the proposed site is insufficient to establish over concentration. It is well-settled that there must be concrete and convincing evidence in the record showing that the proposed residence, considered in conjunction with existing similar facilities, would substantially alter the nature and character of the area in which the proposed residence will be located. [*Jennings v. N.Y.S. Office of Mental Health 90NY2nd (1997)*]

Respectfully submitted,  
Alma Karassavidis, CB8 Staff Member  
August 26, 2015