

## **FLORENCE TOWNSHIP COUNCIL SPECIAL SESSION**

**November 7, 2007**

**7:00 PM**

### **CALL TO ORDER**

Council President Baldorossi called the meeting to order.

### **SUNSHINE STATEMENT**

The Opening Statement was read: Notice of this meeting has been given in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act. Notice was published in the Burlington County Times on October 28, 2007; given to the Register News for information; posted on the municipal bulletin board.

### **ROLL CALL**

Present: John Fratinardo, Bruce Garganio, Elizabeth Ryan, Jerry Sandusky, Frank Baldorossi

Also Present: Mayor Michael Muchowski; Richard A. Brook, Township Administrator; Thomas Sahol, Assistant Municipal Administrator; Dante Guzzi, Township Engineer; Russell Trice, Township Water and Sewer Engineer; William John Kearns, Jr., Township Solicitor; Joy M. Weiler, Township Clerk; William Berry, Mayor Elect; Dennis O'Hara, Council Member Elect; Sean Ryan, Council Member Elect

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Nothing at this time.

All residents having an opportunity to be heard, MOTION by Garganio; seconded by Fratinardo to close the public portion of the meeting. All ayes - motion carried.

### **FAMILY SERVICES: DISCUSSION OF PROGRAMS AND COAH OPTIONS**

Administrator Brook introduced Terrance Huettl, from Whitesell and Bob Pekar, President and CEO of Family Services, who attended this meeting to discuss the possibility of Whitesell and Family Services teaming up. Whitesell has some significant NJ State mandated obligations related to COAH. Family Services is involved in many municipalities throughout the County of Burlington.

Mr. Huettl stated that Whitesell Construction Company is developing the Haines Industrial Center, an industrial park off Route 130 and Cedar Lane. He explained that associated with all of their projects is an obligation to produce affordable housing. There are two (2) large buildings that are currently under construction. Associated with those two (2) buildings is an obligation to produce eleven (11) COAH credits. Mr. Huettl and Mr. Pekar attended this evening to discuss a plan they have to produce those credits. Mr. Huettl explained that any vote tonight to allow them to proceed is just a vote on the concept of Whitesell, Family Services and the township working together to produce the affordable housing. Any vote tonight does not allow Whitesell or Family Services to build or construct anything; there is another round of approvals that would involve Council. They would have to come back before Council with a detailed plan for specific properties. The general concept is that Whitesell would build the affordable housing and Family Service would own, manage and operate them. Family Services is a not for profit agency that employs approximately 800 people in the area and provides services for thousands of people every year in Burlington County. Whitesell has a long history of working on projects with Family Services.

**Florence Township Council Special Session: 11/07/07**

Mr. Pekar thanked Mayor and Council for allowing him to come back to approach the subject he discussed when he was here in March. He would like to clarify what they are trying to accomplish, why they think it is beneficial and how as a team consisting of Florence Township, Whitesell and Family Services they can succeed to find housing for those that need it; housing that is cared for, that the township benefits from and also allows Family Services to care for the people in the community on a daily basis.

Mr. Pekar explained that Family Services behavioral provider services started in 1962 as an alternative to the one provider in the mental health community in Burlington County. The real goal of Family Services was to find a way to have 24 hour on call service for those with emotional or mental illness needs in the community. They started with a very small office where they began providing services to people from homes of Burlington County residents. Since that time, they have grown as an agency serving thousands of individuals on a spectrum of emotional and mental illness problems throughout Burlington County as well as Southern New Jersey. Family Services employees 800 staff members, five of which live in Florence Township, and serves 1,700 to 1,800 consumers on a daily basis. Presently they serve approximately 50 consumers that reside in Florence Township.

Mr. Pekar stated that Family Services provides group homes, partial care programs and a continuum of services for people from the age of two through the entire life spectrum. The real goal of Family Services is to be able to provide a service to people who really need, those who are left out or are marginalized in the community, yet could be prosperous with support and services from Family Services. Family Services has a great reputation not only in providing housing but also case management and therapeutic services of all kinds in particular for those that live in the community.

Mr. Pekar feels that everyone has people they know that have been impacted by the levels of depression, mental illness, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder that are their very clients and everyone's neighbors.

Family Services realized that sometimes those with a mental illness have struggles with basic areas such as food and shelter. Over the last number of years Family Service has implemented a number of programs to address those needs. In particular is Supportive Housing, a program for those that are capable of living in the community with the support of Family Services. Those consumers live in hotels, marginalized boarding rooms or other facilities that most people would agree they do not belong in. Family Services presently serves 60 of those individuals within Burlington County. Mr. Pekar stated that Family Services currently has facilities in Evesham, Moorestown, Delran, Lumberton and Edgewater Park. They are currently in negotiations with Medford and Medford Township.

Mr. Pekar stated that Family Services does deal with the special needs population. They are the people that need Family Services to support them on their road to recovery. What Family Services proposes to do is place those individuals, after a significant screening process, in housing that Whitesell would construct. Family Services responsibility would be to take care of the consumers and the facility. In discussions with Whitesell, it looks like staff could be onsite 4 to 7 hours a day.

Mr. Pekar would like to discuss what he feels he did a poor job of when he was here in March and that would be the screening process. He explained that people are referred through another program of Family Services or other behavioral health organizations in the community. Sadly right now there

**Florence Township Council Special Session: 11/07/07**

is a waiting list for the facilities. Through the process of referrals Family Services begins the screening process; one thing they ask, is the individual on the road to recovery? The individuals brought to these facilities are not people that cannot make it in the community. Family Services' goal is success. Staff does not live in the homes, so the consumers have to be self-sustaining with support. There has to be a commitment to recovery and treatment. Family Services is also looking for consumers that have evidence of being engaged in the community, such as a job or participating in a recovery program. Through the referral process an application with a significant amount of history comes to Family Services. That serves as the first screening process. He explained that the consumers they place in this housing have diagnoses of depression, bipolar depression and schizophrenia; these are people we come in contact with on a daily basis who make it just like anyone else. He stated that there are millions of individuals who have these diseases who are successful in the community, with or without support, because they maintain their mental illness whether through medication or therapy.

Mr. Pekar stated that Family Services looks for any information that would screen out individuals, such as incarceration. They also take measures through the intake process to immediately screen out individuals with any known level of assault, significant or primary drug or alcohol illness or any Megan Law or sexual offenders. Presently none of the 60 consumers in supportive housing have these diagnoses. Mr. Pekar stated that New Jersey Department of Community Affairs requires Family Services to run a 3-year criminal background check because these individuals must be applicable for rental assistance. Staff will be onsite to work with the consumers.

Mr. Pekar stated that the consumers that he knows in the program are as afraid of everyone as they are of them. The diagnosis of mental illness has much to do with the consumers fearing the people of the world. Family Services would like to reintegrate them into the community. Family Services does not want to marginalize them or put them in hotels where they further disorganize and further go into disarray. Once they come into the program they are required to be active in either employment or a therapeutic process. The majority of the consumers have had significant mental illness and many of them have been hospitalized. They do not come to this program until they have been out of any mental institution at least a year or more and have been dealing with their problems. Therefore, Family Services is looking for individuals that are on the road to recovery.

Council Member Sandusky verified that any individual placed in Florence Township would have a background check. Mr. Pekar emphasized that everyone placed in Florence Township would have a background check.

Mr. Pekar stated that Family Services prides themselves on their great reputation.

Council Member Garganio asked what items in the background check would keep someone out of the program? Mr. Pekar stated that the same items he discussed earlier. In response to Council Vice President Fratinardo, Mr. Pekar stated that the background checks are done through New Jersey Department of Community Affairs.

Mayor Muchowski questioned the occupancy per unit? Mr. Pekar stated that they are looking to place, at the most, two (2) – three (3) consumers per unit. The lower the number, the more effective the program is.

**Florence Township Council Special Session: 11/07/07**

Mayor Muchowski feels that it is a difficult recovery for someone if they do not have a decent home with the basic necessities, and believes that is how the supportive housing concept started in Family Services. There are many agencies providing services to those who are effected by various levels of mental illness but they are still grappling with the issue of stable, clean and appropriate housing arrangements. They could be out in the world during the day being productive but return home to a situation that puts you back into disarray, which is not conducive to recovery. Mr. Pekar agrees.

Council Member Garganio asked what the procedure would be if someone violated the rules? Mr. Pekar explained that they would be removed. There is an agreement with the consumer and they would gently be asked to leave but Family Services would have to follow the standard eviction process if that did not work. He further explained that the consumer is not removed as Family Service's client; they would be placed in another program. If the consumer were in a crisis they would be moved to a crisis center. Mayor Muchowski asked, in the six years of the program and 60 consumers, how many situations have arisen where someone had to be removed? Mr. Pekar stated four (4) or five (5) and the standard eviction process was not needed.

Council Member Elect O'Hara asked if Family Services was an independent agency or affiliated with the State of New Jersey? Mr. Pekar responded that Family Services is a private, non-private with contractual arrangements with the State of New Jersey. Council Member Elect O'Hara asked if Family Service's staff could dispense medication? Mr. Pekar explained that Family Service's psychiatrist would write the prescription and the consumer would go to the drug store to get it filled. He stated that the consumers are responsible for independent care; so they really function just like anyone else.

Council Member Elect O'Hara asked if Family Services follows State guidelines? Mr. Pekar explained that Family Services enters into a contract with the State of New Jersey for a particular service; this is called the Supportive Housing Service, which is a licensed program by the State of New Jersey.

Council Member Ryan asked if the consumers in the supportive housing would have a primary diagnosis of drug or alcohol abuse? Mr. Pekar stated that they would not. Council Member Ryan asked if they could have a secondary diagnosis of drug or alcohol abuse and would that be a concern? She also asked what would happen overall in Burlington County if towns like Florence Township do not engage in supportive housing; what happens to this patient population if they do not have units like this to go to? Mr. Pekar explained that they do not place consumers with a primary diagnosis of drug or alcohol abuse in supportive housing but most likely some of the consumers have had issues with drug or alcohol. If they were to the point where that would inhibit them from independent living they would be screened out and most likely placed in a program that deals specifically with drug and alcohol abuse. In response to what would happen to this patient population without these programs, Mr. Pekar stated that currently there are hundreds of residents in Burlington County living in motels or substandard housing. Those are the same marginalized individuals that belong in the community. The consumers that live in substandard conditions become further marginalized and end up hospitalized. What the consumers do not do is get onto the road of recovery and become part of the community.

Mr. Pekar is hoping to gain the support of the township to move towards Family Services, Whitesell and Florence Township working together to create a significant plan, which would get COAH credits, provide affordable housing and provide care for these consumers.

**Florence Township Council Special Session: 11/07/07**

Mayor Muchowski asked what sites they were looking into? Mr. Huettl stated that the goal is to target existing structures that are in need of major rehabilitation and bring them back to life. Through talking with Administrator Brook, they have identified and looked at a number of buildings in the area of Foundry Street. Any structure they buy will be completely gutted and will be brand new inside. Until the concept is approved they have not made a move towards acquiring any properties.

Council Vice President Fratinardo questioned the administration of the COAH requirement. If this concept were to be approved that would be part of the next step. Whitesell and Family Services would work together with the township and their housing consultant to come up with a plan on how Whitesell's obligation is met in a fashion that fits Florence Township's affordable housing plan. As part of that there would be a round of COAH requirements as well, which would come back before Council.

Council Member Garganio asked who would hold ownership of the properties? Mr. Huettl stated that Family Services would hold ownership. Council Member Garganio asked if they were tax exempt? Mr. Pekar stated that they are tax exempt. Council Member Garganio asked how many units they were looking to have and, if allowed, is this the way Whitesell is planning to meet all of their COAH requirements? Mr. Huettl explained that the current request is for the two (2) buildings presently under construction; the COAH obligation for these buildings is eleven (11) credits. Because of the way Family Services is licensed and operates, a credit is earned for every bedroom in a facility opposed to a homebuilder who receives credit per home not bedroom. They are looking to have twelve (12) bedrooms in four (4) facilities. He explained that there are no concrete plans at this time. Council Member Ryan asked if that was definite since so much of COAH was up in the air? Administrator Brook believes that Mr. Huettl is reluctant to get into too many details before going to COAH directly, presenting his proposal and getting their consent that yes, he would get credit. Mayor Muchowski stated that the township would be looking for the same guarantee.

Administrator Brook stated that COAH will be cutting back on the amount of senior housing that a municipality can provide under the third round and get credit for.

Mr. Huettl stated that the consumers placed in supportive housing are all adults; there are no children in this program, therefore no burden on the school system.

Council President Baldorossi thanked Mr. Pekar and Mr. Huettl for coming in this evening. The governing body will discuss and get back to them with a response.

7:45 PM MOTION by Ryan, seconded by Sandusky to adjourn meeting. Roll call vote - all ayes.

**ADJOURNMENT**

7:45 PM Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

JOY M. WEILER, RMC/MMC  
Township Clerk

/mab