



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
185-24 80th Road
Jamaica Estates, NY 11432**

DATE: Tuesday, August 30, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

PLACE: Hillside Manor
188-11 Hillside Avenue
Hollis, NY 11423

ATTENDANCE: Martha Taylor, CB8 Chairperson
Marc A. Haken, CB8 Board Member
Zelda Keaton, Senior Director of Programs, SCFU
Xian Edwards, Director of Residential Services, SCFU
Pravin Mascarenhas, Chief Programs Officer, SCFU
Larry Domenech representing OPWDD
Rong Sylvain representing Councilman Rory Lancman
Steve Dionisiou representing Assemblyman David Weprin
Jessica Douglas representing the Mayor’s Office
Marie Adam-Ovide, CB8 District Manager
Jatnna Reyes, 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 six (6) developmentally disabled persons at the above address. This is a 24-hour Supervised Individual Residential Alternative (IRA) for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Chairperson Martha Taylor, called this Informational Hearing to order at 7:30 p.m.

She welcomed everyone to the hearing and asked everyone to introduce themselves. There was one (2) Board Members present. She 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 14th.

Chairperson Martha Taylor asked that one of the representatives from Special Citizens Futures Unlimited (SCFU) make an opening statement on their plans for the proposed site.

Pravin Mascarenhas – He is the Chief Programs Officer for SCFU. He explained that for over forty years (40) 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 at 185-24 80th Road.

The house will operate as a Supervised Individualized Residential Alternative (IRA) for six (6) young gentlemen with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He explained that two (2) of these individuals will be sharing the 1st floor with attached bathrooms which are wheelchair accessible from the rear. The other four (4) individuals are ambulatory and will have a room for each one on the 2nd floor which also has a bathroom.

He informed us that this house is being rented. The house will have a dedicated Manager/Assistant Manager/ Supervisor under the supervision of a Director responsible for its management and operations. He also stated that this house has passed saturation.

Mr. Mascarenhas asked everyone present if they had any comments/questions.

Susan Mintz –

I was a special education teacher. I taught District 25 Autistic Children, so I know all about this. My question to you is, do they go out by themselves at all?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – For this group, they are high functioning individuals and they will go out by themselves. The two individuals that are in wheelchairs will be accompanied.

Are they verbal?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – Yes.

The back has steps. How are they going to get assistance?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – We will be putting in a ramp for them.

Marc A. Haken –

The two clients on the first floor, what do they do all day?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – They will be going to a program during the day from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Will there be a van at the facility?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – Yes. The house will have a small van that will be parked in the parking lot at the rear of the property.

Have you already selected the individuals that will be at this facility?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – Yes.

What is the age range of these individuals?

Answer: [Zelda Keaton] – They are between 21 and 23. They are currently in residential schools.

Do they come from Queens families or CB8 families?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – Yes. They are from Queens families, not particularly from CB8.

Should you choose to buy this home, are they going to be living there for the rest of their lives?

Will they have 24 hour counselors?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – Yes. We will have two shifts and there will be 24 hours supervision.

Will they have someone to cook for them?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – Yes. Our direct care workers will cook with them and teach them. The idea of this is for them to become more independent as time goes by. There will always be staff there that will help them cook and clean.

Do the other four individuals stay there during the day or do they leave the house?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – They go out.

Do they get escorted?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – If they go to a day program, the day program will send transportation to pick them up. They'll be taken to their respective program and will be brought back as well. There will always be staff with them whether they go out or not.

In addition to having Autism, do any of these clients have other physical disability besides the two individuals in wheelchairs?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – No. It's just the two on the first floor. The other individuals are 100% ambulatory.

We were joined by three clients of SCFU. Chairperson Martha Taylor asked if they were prospects of this house.

Zelda Keaton – Ms. Keaton stated that they aren't prospect of that house. At the last meeting that was held at the Community Board 8 office regarding another group home they were asked about the kind of people they support. She invited these individuals tonight so that the audience gets an idea of how they are.

Marc A. Haken –

You were here for another home?

Answer: [DM Adam-Ovide] – Yes, Briarwood.

Martha Taylor –

I've been asked to ask you if there are any safety plans to prevent people from wandering off? Does that happen?

Answer: [Zelda Keaton] – There are Individualized Service Plans with safe guards that will address the individuals current needs.

Marc A. Haken –

[To Zelda Keaton] Do you have previous experience transferring clients from one facility to another facility?

Answer: [Zelda Keaton] – We really haven't. Now that they are living in community base settings they are totally different people. The house will also have a (Chime) security system.

Martha Taylor –

You are funded by whom?

Answer: [Zelda Keaton] – OPWDD.

Susan Mintz –

What does that stand for, OPWDD?

Answer: [Larry Domenech] – Office for People with Developmental Disabilities.

Public Participation:

Susan Mintz – Ms. Mintz is one of the next door neighbors to the property that will be used as a group home. She had no questions for the applicants, her purpose of attending this meeting was to

make the agency aware of how unsafe the property is at the present time. She stated that the property has: black mold in the basement, lead paint, faulty wiring, leaking pipes etc. She informed us that the owner of the property (Rimma Mulady) who was also present only owns up to 110 ft. back. After that there is another owner who owns the property, there is no fence surrounding the property and if they walk out the back they can go on 80th Drive without having anything to stop them from leaving the property perimeter. She also added that last year a contractor and two others went to an open house because they wanted to buy this house and they were the ones who informed her about all these issues on the property. She stated that this block (80th Road) has a terrible issue with parking. As early as 8 a.m. all parking spaces are taken on the block. She is concerned of where the group home will park their cars.

Martha Taylor –

First of all, there is a driveway. Secondly, [to SCFU applicants] how many cars are you going to have parked there?

Answer: [Zelda Keaton] – There will be one vehicle that will be used to transport the individuals.

Chairperson Taylor asked a few questions to the applicants to address the concerns of the residents that were present.

Martha Taylor –

I'm assuming this but I'll ask anyway. Do you have an architect?

Answer: [Zelda Keaton] – Yes.

And you have certain regulations from OPWDD that say what has to be in that house and how it has to be fixed, repaired and/or maintained? Is that correct? Can you speak a little about that.

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – So, we had the feasibility done three weeks ago. It usually takes them about 2-3 weeks to get back to us with the feasibility report. Since we are state funded we cannot just take someone and put them in a house that is going to endanger their lives. Everything that we are talking about today is being tested, checked and will be repaired before they move in.

Will the yard be fenced-in?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – Yes.

Marc A. Haken –

You mentioned that there is going to be a chime system, is it a security system?

Answer: [Zelda Keaton] – Yes, it is a security system.

What exactly is that?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – It is like ADT. It will alert us when the door opens or anybody opens the door. It will be installed in the entire house.

If for some reason at 1:30 a.m. one of your clients decides to take an excursion, you will know?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – Of course, we will be alerted.

Will there be a fire suppression system?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – There will be a hot wire integrated smoke and heat detector in the entire house.

That's the detectors, suppression system will be a sprinkler system.

Answer: [Zelda Keaton] – No, it's not required.

Will there be a fire escape from the second floor?

Martha Taylor –

Is this required?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – If it's required we will have it.

By the way, it is true what Ms. Mintz said, there is a terrible parking situation on that street. We are trying to get the City to do various things to improve and alleviate the condition. There can never be any double parking in this street (to SCFU applicants).

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – We will not double park. Actually, we have always had good relationships with our neighbors.

Ok. Speaking about neighbors, are you planning to set up a Community Advisory Board with the neighbors?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – Yes, that is a requirement.

I hope that they will be very happy with the improvements that will be made to this property. Have you already signed the lease?

Answer: [Pravin Mascarenhas] – No, we have a draft lease. We have a few more steps to go through. Once everything is corrected and approved then we will sign the lease.

To owner of the house [Rimma Mulady] have you approved the terms of the lease? Are you ready to sign it?

Answer: [Rimma Mulady] – The lawyer is involved. Yes, I am ready to sign it.

Who is your realtor?

Answer: [Rimma Mulady] – Atmack Realty.

Susan Mintz –

To [applicants] I know you have a house on Kent Street, which is closer to the corner. This one is in the middle of the block.

Martha Taylor –

Do you know how many years we've had group homes in this area?

Answer: [Susan Mintz] – 30.

Have you heard anyone complaining about any of them?

Answer: [Susan Mintz] – No. I am not complaining either. I taught autistic special education children for twenty-seven (27) years. I have nothing against anybody. I just want that house to be safe for whoever goes in there.

I am absolutely convinced that there is no one living in Jamaica Estates and Holliswood, which constitutes Area 7, (a subdivision of our Community Board) who knows where all the group homes are located. There are no problems. All problems are addressed. Part of the presence in that is the Community Advisory Board, so if something happens that you feel that you need to discuss it with the management team, then they will be available to do that.

Susan Mintz –

That doesn't change anything with our R1-2 code?

Answer: [Martha Taylor] – No. This is a community facility. A community facility can go anywhere. In addition, since 1994 correct me if I am wrong there is a federal act called the Americans with Disabilities Act and any violation of that is a federal violation. What it says in part is that you cannot discriminate in housing for people with disabilities. The Padavan Law, was sponsored in the State Senate by then Senator Frank Padavan. He'll be the first one to tell you; it's no longer legal. No one can use it, can't use it about saturation, about finding alternative spots in somebodyelse's neighborhood cause you don't want it in yours, it's totally in violation of all of that.

Martha Taylor –

I will tell you a personal story. The very first group home which has been in Holliswood for about 30 years. The community was not as respectful, understanding and accepting of people with disabilities as it is now. By the way, we may be the only Community Board at this point

who does not have ULURP hearings and votes on group homes. In those days, I chaired the hearing. It was at Holliswood Hospital and people were screaming, yelling and cursing at each other. They were grabbing the microphone from each other, and the vote was taken. The vote was in favor of the group home. After that, I received threats. My tires were slashed. At the general Community Board meeting, I had to have police there to secure me. We've come a long way from that and I respect the fact that the people here tonight are amenable and accepting. I just want to make sure that this will be done properly. We are looking forward to it.

To [applicants] would you have a landscaper?

Answer: *[Pravin Mascarenhas] – Yes.*

So, the lawn will be maintained, the garden will be maintained, and there will be a tremendous improvement of what is there now.

Professor Cheruvellil –

I actually just came here for the information. I live next door to this house.

Martha Taylor –

On the other side from Ms. Mintz?

Answer: *[Prof. Cheruvellil] – Yes.*

Professor Cheruvellil –

I have lived there most of my elder life. My children grew up there, they went to school there, so I have a total commitment in maintaining the character of the neighborhood. Last couple of years, we had several St. John's students living there.

Martha Taylor –

We know that. That's finished.

Professor Cheruvellil –

Let me tell you my side of it. Whenever they had a party there, and the next day I had to pick up cans and things from my property. One concern I have is that I hope we will have a quiet neighborhood. The property behind them you have to see it, it's like a jungle. All kinds of weeds are growing. There are raccoons running around. This is a real problem.

Martha Taylor –

They are aware of it. They are very familiar with the property. The property will be cleaned. They have explained that they will fence off their property so that will be separate from what's behind it. It is not going to be an issue.

Professor Cheruvellil –

Will there be a fence in the middle of their property and my property?

Answer: *[Pravin Mascarenhas] – No, just in the back of the property.*

Marc A. Haken –

What is your fear? What are you afraid of?

Answer: *[Prof. Cheruvellil] – I am not afraid of anything.*

Are you afraid that there will be damage to your house?

Answer: *[Prof. Cheruvellil] – No, not at all.*

Are you afraid that because this house is next to you the value of your home will decrease?

Answer: *[Prof. Cheruvellil] – Not at all.*

I think that this group has addressed every single issue that has been brought up in regards to the landscaping. They have to fix the physical condition of the home up to the State qualification and the City Health Code. In order to get a Certificate of Occupancy they will spend a lot of money. They will bring the level of this house to match the level of your house next door.

Martha Taylor –

I can make a suggestion, if you want a fence, you can put a fence up. Just make sure is a legal fence according to the Department of Buildings.

Chairperson Taylor asked if any of the clients that are present were eager to speak to us tonight. Each one of them said a few words.

Paul (SCFU Client) – *I live in Farmingdale. I take community walks, I cook my own food. I do weekly food shopping once a week (every Sunday) by myself. I do different things. I take my own medication. I do my own blood pressure. I make my own breakfast, lunch and dinner. I moved to Farmingdale on Thursday, May 30, 2013. I have been with SCFU since 1986.*

Xian Edwards –

Paul transitioned from a 24-hour Supervised Residential Alternative to non 24-hours Supervised Residential Alternative. He has regular check-ups daily.

CJ (SCFU Client) – *I live in Deerfield Group Home. I've been there since January. I do my own things with some help. I make my own breakfast. I go to a program in Grand Concourse from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. then I come back and take an afternoon walk. I have dinner and then go to an evening walk. I do laundry on Wednesday and shopping on Tuesday with staff. I like to participate in activities.*

Martha Taylor –

Is there a third person that would like to speak?

Daniel Stumps (SCFU Client) – *Good Evening! It's good to see you. My name is Daniel Stumps. I am from the Bronx, Riverdale. You know what I did last night? I went to the pool and swam. I play instruments. Next week I am going on vacation to Washington D.C.*

Zelda Keaton distributed packets to the residents with information about Special Citizens Futures Unlimited and the services they provide.

Chairperson Martha Taylor thanked everyone for coming.

Marc A. Haken made a motion to adjourn this meeting at 8:11 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,
Jatnna Reyes, CB8 Staff Member
September 6, 2016*