

**CASTLE SHANNON BOROUGH
MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 18, 2021
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING**

The following commissioners were present: M. Levin; T. Swisher; W. Grand; R. Broman. Absent: V. Kochenderfer.

Also present: P. Vietmeier, Borough Zoning Officer; K. Stringent, Borough Manager; D. Biondo, Borough Solicitor.

The minutes of the October 18, 2021, Planning Commission Meeting were presented. Mr. Grand motioned to approve the minutes; Mr. Broman seconded; all in favor; motion carried.

Citizen/Board Comments: None.

Old Business: None.

New Business:

St. Anne School (4040 Willow Avenue): Mr. Keith Creehan, was present on behalf of South Hills Catholic Academy (550 Sleepy Hollow Road); and Mr. Robert Sherwin, Executive Branch Director was present on behalf of Bethany Christian Services of Western Pennsylvania (10521 Perry Highway, Ste. 200, Wexford, PA).

Mr. Creehan began the presentation by noting the current use of the Saint Anne's campus stating that the organization uses the St. Winifred's campus as the primary campus for students however in the absence of a gym facility the St. Winifred's students utilize the Saint Anne's facility for their gymnasium needs. Mr. Creehan further explained that the current plan is to continue to use the gymnasium facilities at Saint Anne's until such time as the St. Winifred's enrollment increases to allow South Hills Catholic Academy to utilize both St. Winifred's and Saint Anne's as primary school locations. In the meantime, South Hills Catholic Academy would like to lease a portion of the building to a likeminded organization to provide supplemental income to the organization. Mr. Creehan stated that Bethany Christian Services fits in the with the mission of South Hills Catholic Academy to help and support children in need.

Mr. Levin asked Mr. Creehan if South Hills Catholic Academy will continue to use the gymnasium on a daily basis to which he replied in the affirmative.

Mr. Creehan stated that the intention is to lease approximately two thirds of the building to Bethany Christian while continuing to utilize the gymnasium facilities.

Mr. Swisher asked if the lease by Bethany Christian would function as a lease to purchase to which Mr. Creehan replied that it would not be. South Hills Catholic Academy intends to maintain sole ownership of the building until such time enrollment would necessitate the daily use of Saint Anne's for student instruction.

Mr. Grand asked if the intention was to lease only 40% of the building to which Mr. Creehan replied that it was, yes.

Mr. Grand further inquired if South Hills Catholic Academy was currently using the classrooms within the Saint Anne's building to which Mr. Creehan, replied that they are not.

Mr. Biondo asked Mr. Creehan, for the legal name of the organization to which Mr. Creehan replied South Hills Catholic Academy. Mr. Biondo, further asked if the organization was part of the Diocese of Pittsburgh to which Mr. Creehan replied that they are not part of the Diocese.

Mr. Creehan reiterated that the building is currently being used only for gymnasium purposes and that the organization is required to be licensed by the Commonwealth. Mr. Creehan stated that he will provide a copy of the license to the Borough.

Mr. Biondo inquired as to the use of the building once the building would be leased to which Mr. Creehan replied that Mr. Sherwin would further elaborate.

Mr. Biondo asked if Bethany Christian was a tax-exempt organization to which Mr. Creehan, replied that they are.

Mr. Creehan then presented Mr. Sherwin to discuss the intended use of the facility by Bethany Christian Services.

Mr. Sherwin stated that Bethany Christian Services is a global nonprofit organization with 501c3 status. The organization provides private child and youth foster services licensed by the Commonwealth. The intended hours of operation for the facility would be 9 am to 3 pm Monday through Friday. At the Castle Shannon location, Bethany Christian would provide educational support services to approximately 24 children with thirty (30) employees. Bethany Christian is not intending on making major renovations to the building

Mr. Grand asked if services would be provided to both children and families to which Mr. Sherwin replied that children would potentially be coming to the site from all over the world.

Mr. Broman asked Mr. Sherwin to elaborate on the types of curricula provided to the students to which Mr. Sherwin replied that English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction would be provided as well as preparation and skills development for public school.

Mr. Levin then inquired as to the plan for the children once they are in the United States to which Mr. Sherwin noted that the goal is to reunite the children with their family members located throughout the United States. The children will come to the United States and be placed in short-term foster care with a local family no more than 45 minutes away from the Saint Anne's facility. The children will then be brought to the Saint Anne's facility by their foster parents to gain the skills and support offered by Bethany.

Mr. Levin asked if the organization is currently operating within the Saint Anne's facility to which Mr. Sherwin replied that they are not they are currently only in the process of onboarding staff members.

Mr. Swisher ask if Bethany Christian is working with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services to which Mr. Sherwin stated that they are.

Mr. Biondo inquired if they children would be unaccompanied minors, and if so what would be the age of the children.

Mr. Sherwin stated that the children would be 12 and younger and once they are placed with Bethany they would immediately receive the services of an immigration attorney.

Mr. Biondo asked Mr. Sherwin to note the location of the other Bethany offices throughout the Commonwealth and provide them to Mr. Vietmeier.

Mr. Swisher asked if adoptive services will be provided to which Mr. Sherwin stated that they would not.

Mr. Levin asked who would be responsible for making the decision regarding whether or not the child stays in the US. Mr. Sherwin stated that prior to arriving with Bethany the child is already aware of who the relative or sponsor is within the US and 98% of the children chose to reunite with their family. Approximately 2% chose to return to their home country.

Mr. Biondo inquired as to the significance of the 45-60 days the children are in the short-term foster system to which Mr. Sherwin stated that this is the maximum amount of time Bethany has in order to investigate the known relative or sponsor to ensure that they are capable of continuing to raise the child. Mr. Sherwin noted that the initial 45-60 days are spent investigating the family.

Mr. Swisher and Mr. Broman discussed the R-3: High Density Residential District within which Saint Anne's school is located and the permitted uses within the Zoning District. The Saint Anne's School has functioned as a school for over 120 years, originally enacted in 1894.

Mr. Levin then asked for further clarification regarding the 45-60 day timeframe noted by Mr. Sherwin. Mr. Sherwin clarified that that is the shortest amount of time within which a relative or sponsor can be investigated and then the child placed. Children can stay longer but would then be placed into a long-term foster placement of which Bethany does not provide.

Mr. Sherwin then further discussed long-term versus short-term foster care.

Mr. Biondo asked clarifying questions regarding the immigration process and the background of the children and parents prior to their entry to the United States.

Mr. Sherwin explained the process by which the children arrive in the United States and the immediate follow up steps that must be taken as required by Federal Law.

Mr. Sherwin stated that from time to time the facility may see 14, 15, or 16 year olds.

Mr. Biondo thanked Mr. Sherwin and noted that the intention of this evenings Planning Commission meeting was to get a better understanding of the proposed use.

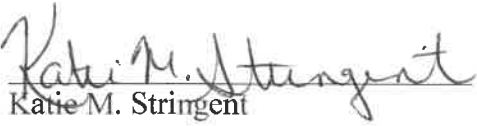
Mr. Swisher stated that he is in favor of the use and allowing for the three-year lease to Bethany Christian Services.

Mr. Levin noted that there is no formal request of Bethany Christian in front of the Commission this evening however there may be a motion forthcoming for future consideration.

Mr. Swisher made a motion to approve the use of Saint Anne's school for the purpose of service provision by Bethany Christian Services. The motion did not receive a second. The motion did not carry.

Mr. Swisher stated that the Borough should consider an update to the Zoning Ordinance.

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Mr. Grand, seconded by Mr. Broman. The motion was adopted. Chairman Levin adjourned the meeting at 7:55 pm.


Katie M. Stringent
Borough Manager/Acting Secretary