

**Conditional Use Hearing**  
**Navy Marine Center 615 Kenhorst Blvd.**  
**Mary's Shelter**  
**Council Chambers**  
**Tuesday, March 6, 2012**  
**5 p.m.**

Mr. Acosta called the Conditional Use Hearing to order. He stated that the City of Reading is divided into zoning districts which regulate the use of property. Certain types of uses may impact surrounding properties or their neighborhoods. Each zone is designated with certain permitted, conditional and prohibited uses. A "conditional use permit" provides special consideration of certain specified uses which may or may not be compatible with an area depending on the specifics of the particular project. The City uses the Conditional Use Public Hearing to evaluate whether a proposed use is appropriate for a particular property and neighborhood. The federal government built this facility before the City's initial zoning ordinance was enacted. The property is located within an R2 zoning district where Group Homes are permitted as a Conditional Use only. Mary's Shelter's proposed reuse of this facility is in compliance with the Reuse Plan, as amended, by the Reading Local Redevelopment Authority.

**Attending:** City Councilors Acosta, Corcoran, Sterner, Reed, Goodman-Hinnershitz, Marmarou, City Clerk Kelleher, Legal Specialist Lachat, Esq., Zoning Administrator Peifer, City Planner Miller.

Mr. Acosta asked Mr. Lachat to conduct the hearing.

Mr. Lachat outlined the hearing procedure. Ms. Kelleher provided a copy of the agenda and property information to the applicant

**I. Testimony from Applicant** (No more than 10 minutes)  
**Mary's Shelter, Chris Folk, Executive Director**

Mr. Lachat asked the applicant to step forward. Ms. Kelleher administered the oath to Ms. Folk.

Mr. Lachat entered the agenda with all attachments into the record as City Exhibit A.

Ms. Folk stated that Mary's Shelter is a maternity home for young unmarried women who have become homeless and have no support system. Mary's Shelter belongs to Real Alternatives network, which is a partner program. Mary's Shelter provides education on pregnancy and prenatal care along with an educational plan. She stated that young women must either obtain their High School diploma or their GED. If they are post-high school, they

must develop a sustainable career plan.

Ms. Folk stated that Mary's Shelter currently operates on South 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Upland Avenue. However, these facilities do not provide space to serve young women who have children. If the permit is granted the facility on South 12<sup>th</sup> Street would close and move to Kenhorst Blvd. Relocation to this facility would allow the addition of administrative space, classroom space, an indoor and outdoor play area along with extra bedroom space.

Ms. Folk explained that Mary's Shelter originally applied to locate in the Navy Marine Center back in 2006 when the County was undertaking the Local Redevelopment Authority (LRA) process. She stated that Mary's Shelter applied again after the City became the LRA in 2008. She described the work of the LRA with the surrounding community to find the highest and best use for this property. She explained that the BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) program, through HUD, requires that consideration be provided to homeless uses.

Ms. Folk stated that three (3) public meetings were held with the surrounding community and that Mary's Shelter location on the parcel was supported. She stated that neighbors didn't want to see a change in the appearance of the main building and Mary's Shelter will not be making changes to the exterior of the building but will rehabilitate the interior in phases. Mary's Shelter will begin by occupying the left side of the building. She noted that the facility has all the components needed such as a kitchen, dining hall, bathrooms, rooms that can be converted to bedrooms, offices, classrooms, and storage.

Ms. Folk described the transitional home located on Upland Avenue, the success of that program and how it complements the surrounding neighborhood. She stated that the facility on South 12<sup>th</sup> Street is an old convent and the tight quarters are not conducive to the program. She stated that Mary's Shelter facilities do not have problems with crime or criminal behavior as the participants do not have a family or support system. She also stated that participants do not have vehicles so there is no increase in traffic or parking needs; however 29 off-street parking spaces are located around the main building. She explained that clients with drug/alcohol issues are not accepted into Mary's Shelter's program.

### **Council Cross Examination**

Mr. Marmarou inquired about the number of rooms that would be immediately used. Ms. Folk stated that ten (10) rooms will be converted to bedroom space immediately and another six (6) to ten (10) rooms are planned for the other side of the building.

Mr. Corcoran inquired about the length of time a client resides at Mary's Shelter. Ms. Folk stated that clients come in during the first or second trimester and are able to stay until the baby is three (3) months old. She noted that there are usually no repeat clients, due to the educational and career components.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired if Mary's Shelter will be leaving the convent on South 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Ms. Folk stated that they would be leaving the convent space, due to the limited bedroom sizes.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if Mary's Shelter would be expanding or changing the types of clients accepted into the program. Ms. Folk stated that Mary's Shelter will remain serving the same population.

Mr. Acosta inquired about the facility on Upland Avenue. Ms. Folk stated that the facility is across from St. Mary's cemetery, a bit up the road from the Upland Café. Mr. Acosta stated that he never knew that the home was not a single family residential property. Ms. Folk stated that Mary's Shelter has served approximately 350 young women over the last 15 years. She explained that many young women stay in touch after they move on with their lives and often return for reunions. She described some of the program's success stories.

Mr. Corcoran inquired about participation of the fathers. Ms. Folk stated that the fathers are not involved the majority of the time. However, if they are still in touch with the client they are encouraged to participate in maternity and child care classes.

### **Testimony from City Staff**

Mr. Lachat asked City Planner Andrew Miller, representing the Planning Commission, to step forward. Ms. Kelleher administered the oath to Mr. Miller.

Mr. Miller stated that a member of the Planning Commission is an LRA member and told the Commission that this application was very thoroughly vetted by the LRA. Mr. Miller stated that the Planning Commission, after discussion, approved Resolution No. 7-2012, recommending the approval of the permit at their February 25<sup>th</sup> meeting. He stated that the Commission recognized that this reuse is more directed by the BRAC process and the LRA. He stated that Mary's Shelter will be submitting a subdivision plan within the next two (2) months.

Mr. Corcoran stated that he attended the Planning Commission meeting and questioned if a certain percentage of the site must be used for homeless purposes. Mr. Miller stated that homeless reuse must be considered and that a specific percentage of the area is not required. He explained that originally Mary's Shelter was to get a one acre tract along Pershing Blvd; however, the amendment of the plan gives the main facility to Mary's Shelter. The main facility sits on approximately two (2) acres at the front of the site.

Ms. Kelleher explained that the BRAC process requires the LRA to advertise for reuse by homeless providers. If a homeless provider is not identified then the LRA can consider reuse for government, educational or health purposes.

Mr. Lachat asked Mr. Peifer, Zoning Administrator, to step forward. Ms. Kelleher administered the oath to Mr. Peifer.

Mr. Peifer stated that this site sits in an R2 zoning district. He stated that this particular parcel lies within an Institutional Overlay zone. He described the intent of the R2 zoning district. He stated that the application meets the conditions required by the zoning ordinance. He stated that he toured Mary's Shelter's current facilities and visited the proposed Navy Marine Site. He recommended approval of the permit.

### **Public Comment**

Mr. Lachat opened the floor for public comment.

Ms. Kelleher administered the oath to Heath Crandell, of Meade Street. Mr. Crandell questioned the requirement to have a homeless reuse of this site. Ms. Kelleher explained the BRAC process and HUD requirements and added that Mary's Shelter will be obtaining the main facility on a two (2) acre tract. The Reading Redevelopment Authority will be bidding to purchase the remainder of the site, after the Navy sets the fair market value. He stated that he would prefer to see the site used for taxable purposes. He also stated that this area is plagued with crime and he expressed concern that this proposed reuse would have a negative impact on the surrounding properties.

Mr. Acosta explained that originally the Reading Hospital was going to use this site but learned that it would cost between \$500K and \$1M to demolish the main facility. He expressed the belief that the high demolition cost caused other proposed uses to step away from this site. He explained that the LRA had consultants evaluate the site and they found that it was not well suited for commercial purposes. He stated that the LRA was concerned that if the main facility became vacant it would have a broader negative impact on the surrounding community. He stated that having Mary's Shelter locate in the main facility is a positive as the building will remain intact and well maintained. He noted the challenge of beautifying a bare-bones military facility.

Ms. Kelleher administered the oath to Betsey Hendel, of Joan Terrace. Ms. Hendel inquired about what would happen to the building after Mary's Shelter no longer wished to use this as a temporary shelter. Mr. Acosta explained that Mary's Shelter acts as a temporary shelter for their clients and that Mary's Shelter wishes to permanently locate at this site.

Ms. Hendel inquired about Mary's Shelter's expansion to serve additional clients. She expressed the belief that the eventual expansion of 16-18 rooms is very minimal when considering the size of the building. She also questioned the inclusion of play areas. She stated that she reviewed all the LRA meeting minutes on the City's website. She suggested

that Mary's Shelter instead purchase the YWCA at 8<sup>th</sup> and Washington as it has bedrooms, a gymnasium and kitchen area. She also noted the community's desire to keep Margaret Street closed to through traffic.

Ms. Hendel inquired how Mary's Shelter will remediate any environmental contamination. Ms. Kelleher explained that CERCLA regulations require the Navy to return to remediate any environmental contamination identified. She also explained that Ms. Preston, Real Estate Specialist has been assigned by the Navy to this project. Ms. Kelleher stated that the Navy provided environmental studies of the site, which are also on the City's website.

Ms. Folk stated that the LRA retained a consultant to examine the site and undertake a variety of planning tasks. The consultants provided assistance to the LRA when the reuse of the site was considered. She noted that Mary's Shelter's application for the reuse of the main building has been approved by Linda Charest from HUD.

Ms. Reed left the hearing at this time.

### **Applicants Rebuttal**

In response to Ms. Hendel's comment regarding Mary's Shelter's clients use of subsidized housing as their next step, Ms. Folk stated that clients are not usually able to retain other types of housing when they first leave Mary's Shelter and they use subsidized housing as a stepping stone. She noted the family environment of Mary's Shelter. She stated that this site will enable Mary's Shelter to serve more young pregnant women and have additional staff on site. She explained that the play area will not be a public playground type facility but a fenced in area in addition to the indoor play space provided by the indoor gym.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired if Mary's Shelter considered other locations. Ms. Folk stated that other locations were considered over a long period of time; however, this facility meets all of the Shelter's needs due to its size, its features, its proximate location to the Reading Hospital and it's location on the public transportation system.

Mr. Acosta stated that City Council is required to approve or deny the application within 45 days of the hearing. He stated that the decision will be made by resolution at Council's regular business meeting on March 26<sup>th</sup>.

The hearing was adjourned.

*Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk*