

## Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Yorkshire Homeowners Association

**Purpose:** Share facts about the decision to locate a group home for the mentally ill at 101 Woodmere Drive.

**Location:** Williamsburg Community Center

**Date:** Sept 14, 2016

Meeting was called to order by Board President, Ed Brandt, who thanked the Mayor for facilitating our use of the Community Center. He then welcomed Yorkshire residents as well as representatives from several other homeowners associations and the local media. After introducing the Yorkshire Board of Directors and Council of Past Presidents, Ed displayed the agenda for the evening:

- Welcome/Introductions
- Timeline of Events
- What We Can Do as Individuals and as a Community
- Questions for Gateway
- Q&A

Ed then introduced Mike Dallas, who has been leading the Yorkshire Association's efforts to oppose the group home.

Mike explained that, while the process has been going forward since late spring, the affected homeowners have been left in the dark. Even the City of Williamsburg was not aware of the process until late summer.

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| May 2016      | Trustee for property at 101 Woodmere (Middleburg Bank) entered into lease agreement with group home contractor (Gateway Homes) to use property as halfway house. Applied for license from State Dept of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS). Did not inform Woods HOA. |
| Jun 8-9, 2016 | City Code Compliance Office received emails from Gateway Homes requesting assistance in obtaining a certificate of occupancy for a group home at 101 Woodmere.  |
| Jun 16, 2016  | Code Compliance replied that no certificate was needed according to the building code, but an inspection was ordered.   |
| Jun 21, 2016  | City conducted fire inspection.   |
| Aug 2-4, 2016 | Gateway informed David Coe (no relation to Yorkshire's Thomas Coe) of Colonial Behavioral Health (their contact for this area) that halfway house was coming; Coe informed City Human Services Manager; he informed City Manager.   |
| Aug 16, 2016  | City Manager had Human Services brief entire City staff, JCC staff (as there would be a second halfway house in JCC), and Colonial Behavioral Health.   |
| Aug 19, 2016  | City Manager meets with Bob Sewell, Woods HOA President, at Sewell's request.   |

Mike added that, under the enabling state legislation, none of the players--Middleburg Bank, Gateway Homes, the DBHDS--was required to inform the local jurisdiction (City government) or nearby residents of what was happening.

Once the City was informed, and they were contacted by the Woods Homeowners Association President, they addressed questions to the DBHDS.

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| Aug 25, 2016 | After questions raised in meeting were addressed to DBHDS via email and phone without response, City Manager sends letter of concern to DBHDS Commissioner requesting license not be issued to Gateway.   |
| Aug 26, 2016 | Woods HOA sends letters of concern to President of Middleburg Bank and Delegate Monty Mason.  |
| Aug 29, 2016 | Bob Sewell informs HOAs of Yorkshire, Holly Hills, the Woodlands, as well as Walsingham Academy and Walnut Hills Baptist Church about the situation. Ed Brandt discusses situation with Sister Mary Jean of Walsingham and informs Yorkshire BOD members. |

- Aug 30, 2016 Sewell sends message to City Manager suggesting City file injunction against Middleburg/Gateway to stop process. City staff advises against this as City has no legal standing.
- Aug 31, 2016 DBHDS finally responds to City Manager's letter stating that Gateway will not accept applicants who are sex offenders. No info about other offenders.
- Aug 31-Sept 8 Several conversations/meetings between Ed Brandt, Mike Dallas, and Monty Mason requesting his assistance/intervention
- Sep 1, 2016 BOD discusses method to bring the membership up to speed as the story will soon appear in the Gazette in some form.
- Sep 2, 2016 Ed updates BOD on Woods HOA dissatisfaction with slow City response , but agreeing City should take the lead.
- Sep 5, 2016 Initial message to membership sent
- Sep 7-8, 2016 Meeting with Ed, Mike, City Manager, and the Mayor. Updated message sent to membership. Article appears in Gazette.  
Ed calls working session of BOD and past Presidents for Monday, Sep 12 to discuss agenda for special meeting of membership
- Sept 9, 2016 Ed talks to Sen. Norment's office. Norment sends letter to Hampton-Newport News CSB (atch) requesting that an alternative location be found for the group home.
- Sep 12, 2016 Yorkshire BOD and Past Presidents meet to finalize agenda for Membership meeting

Given the fact that neither the local jurisdictions--cities, counties--have any legal standing under state law and that the process has progressed past the approval and licensing stage, Mike offered a series of proposals for what we could do as individuals and communities.

- Letter writing campaign to State Representative/other elected officials expressing our strong opposition and to request to change provisions in the State legislation regarding the proximity of group homes to schools – Williamsburg City Council, Senator Norment, Delegate Mason, Commissioner of DBHDS
- Emails to the points-of-contact provided in provided handouts (and attached to these minutes) expressing our concern and solidarity as a community – cc: to Will Hummell, [WTH130@gmail.com](mailto:WTH130@gmail.com)
- Letters to Middleburg bank expressing extreme displeasure (sample provided at meeting)
- Show of support for City's legislative agenda which requests a half mile buffer zone around all schools
- Make this a campaign issue; invite candidates to speak to our community about group homes; vote for those who have supported/protected our community
- Expand press coverage beyond Virginia Gazette
- Make use of social media – Facebook, Twitter, The Last Word, letters to editor/editorials
- Help us keep track of your actions by sending email to Mike Dallas, [mdallas3@cox.net](mailto:mdallas3@cox.net) and Will Hummel, [WTH130@gmail.com](mailto:WTH130@gmail.com)

Mike and Ed pointed out that they, among a few others, have been invited to a meeting with Gateway's attorneys to "answer any questions they may have" on Friday, Sept 16. Mike and Ed displayed a list of questions they intend to ask and solicited others from the membership and promised to send out the answers to the Yorkshire membership and other involved HOAs:

- What was the basis/decision making process for placing the group home in a neighborhood that is 500 feet from a pre-K thru 12 school and less than ½ mile from College of William and Mary
- How many homes did Gateway look at before deciding on 101 Woodmere
- What is the relationship between Gateway and the Hampton-Newport News Community Services Board
- Where else does Gateway have a group home that is located within 500 feet of a pre-K thru 12 school
- Why was there no attempt to contact City leadership prior to signing a lease to ensure full transparency

- What is the criteria for selecting individuals to reside in the group home. Will the home admit residents who have been involved in or committed violent acts up to and including murder
- Will City residents be made aware of crimes or acts that have been committed by residents who are residing in the group without naming individuals
- What is the length of the lease signed by Gateway for the group home
- What is the oversight process for the group home. By whom and how often will the group home be inspected. Will the City be able to inspect the home for compliance with the license
- How long will the residents typically reside in the group home. What is the typical turnover rate
- Will the residents be allowed to move freely with no restrictions around the City of Williamsburg
- If the City identifies an alternative/suitable location, is Gateway willing to move and how quickly. What are the requirements for a home to meet the requirements for a group home
- What are the credentials of the supervising staff and what is their expected turnover?
- Will Gateway give assurances about safety? What would they be?
- Will group home residents be wearing electronic monitors? How will their movements be controlled?
- What is Gateway's responsibility should one of the group damage personal property or attack a resident? If Gateway is not responsible what organization is?

At this point, Mike and Ed opened the floor to questions/comments.

- Request made to not use term “insane” as our problem is not with the individuals who may eventually occupy the home, but with those who decided to have them there. Recommend primary thrust of our efforts should be on safety; both of residents and surrounding community. This would be more effective than the “Not in My Backyard” approach.
- Yorkshire resident Tom Coe (mental health professional) spoke for the future residents of the home as well. In his experience these will come from Eastern State Hospital which does not house violent offenders/patients. Further, it is likely that Gateway will be careful to choose the lowest risk residents in order to make the group home a success. He added that what the community should really want from Gateway is transparency and communication.
- At least two members of the audience expressed concern about the effect on property values, and asked why zoning laws did not seem to apply. The answer is that the state law authorizing the group home trumps any local ordinances and specifically defines an 8-resident group home as “single family” anyway.
- Other speakers mentioned speaking to Gateway staff at the home and finding them very open, concerned, and willing to answer their questions; as well as informing the audience that Gateway is holding an open house on Sept 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- A speaker who identified herself as a Registered Nurse felt that residents could be unpredictable if they failed to take their medication; making them potentially dangerous.
- A Holly Hills resident suggested expanding our letter-writing campaign beyond the City since the group home will not be far from some James City County neighborhoods and many Walsingham students live outside the City proper. The thrust should be on the danger to school children. In addition, he felt the precedent that Middleburg/Gateway is setting could affect the entire area and similar neighborhoods should be forewarned. Finally, having read the actual enabling legislation, he strongly advocated working to get the law changed so local governments are involved in these decisions and their residents’ desires, in the form of zoning rules and ordinances, are considered.
- Billy Scruggs seconded these comments as a former member of a local planning commission.
- A speaker suggested we follow up on why group home in Kingsmill was closed after a year.
- Finally, there was a suggestion that the neighborhood associations loosely consolidate when taking these actions to provide more clout. This might be little more than a name and letterhead with a Board made up of HOA presidents, but it could be helpful. The reaction to this idea was mostly positive.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Bruce Ullman, Secretary  
Yorkshire of Williamsburg Homeowners Association

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