

Notes from Meeting with Gateway Homes

Yorkshire BOD members Ed Brandt, Mike Dallas, and Jerry Howell met with attorneys for Gateway Homes on 9/16/16 at the Stryker Building. Gateway invited us along with other members of the community. Gateway gave an overview of their history and mission and how they operate their group homes. They explained that they bid on a request for proposal from the Hampton-Newport News Community Services Board (HN-CSB) to place two group homes in a service area (State Region 5) the region that stretches from Williamsburg/James City County to Hampton/Eastern Shore. They said that the group home on 101 Woodmere is for individuals who have been released from Eastern State Hospital who have had severe mental issues, who are not intellectually or developmentally challenged, but who have a confirmed recent history of medicated and/or otherwise stable behavior, and are ready to participate in regular society. These could include individuals from those who were self-committed to those who were committed under court order, for behavioral and/or criminal acts.

There would be eight individuals in the home with 24/7 staff and a nurse during the day. There will also be a “peer specialist” - someone who has been a past resident of one of these homes.

Following Gateway’s statement we were given the opportunity to ask questions. The questions we asked and Gateway’s answers are as follows:

Q. 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?

A. Gateway follows the state guidelines for this type of home (infrastructure) but which apparently do not include any guidelines for considerations beyond the property itself. They did not consider the fact that it was located 273 linear feet from a pre-K through 12 school, a neighborhood full of young children, or the College of W&M. They admitted they had visited the property prior to signing the lease, but did not realize that there was a school that close. They were surprised by our concern, and said they did not realize that Walsingham was there..

Q. How many homes did Gateway look at before deciding on 101 Woodmere?

A. They were “not sure” and did not know (or remember). They relied on their realtor to find the right home for their requirements.

Q. What is the relationship between Gateway and the HN-CSB?

A, This was interesting. HN-CSB received funding from the state to locate two group homes in Region 5. State practice, according to David Coe of Colonial Health CSB (the Williamsburg mental health agency), is to locate the homes in the CSB area that receives the funding, i.e, the new home would normally have been located in the Hampton-Newport News area. In this case the homes were located in the Colonial CSB, not the HN-CSB. Gateway won the contract from HN-CSB (the funding and contracting agency), but chose Williamsburg as the area to locate the two homes. According to David Coe, this is an irregular practice. Gateway did not itself locate the potential properties. They hired a realtor to survey available properties throughout Region 5 that met the “structural” requirements and that were owned by someone “willing to rent” for the purpose of a group home. The two locations that were found are 101 Woodmere and one in the vicinity of Olde Towne Road in JCC.

Q. Where else does Gateway have a group home that is located within 500 feet of a pre-K thru 12 school?

A. Gateway said they “do not know.”

Q. Why was there no attempt to contact City leadership prior to signing a lease to ensure full transparency?

A. Gateway said their contract with the HN-CSB stipulated a single point of contact, from a contract administration point of view, and that was the administrator with the HN-CSB. The contract did not specifically prohibit communication with the Colonial CSB or the City of Williamsburg, nor did it encourage such communication. Gateway apparently chose not to do so. They said they had talked to the City Codes Compliance Dept (to get a certificate of occupancy). NOTE: We pointed out that that Codes Compliance is not City management. We also wondered why, if Gateway wanted to be a cooperative and productive member of our community, it would slip in under the radar to avoid any discussion with the City or the community

Q. What are 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?

A. Gateway evaded this question by saying, “It is up to the judge.” NOTE: We learned/concluded that it is entirely possible and, in fact, likely, that there will be residents who have been involved in violent acts housed at 101 Woodmere.

Q. 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?

A. No

Q. What is the length of the lease signed by Gateway for the group home?

A. One year effective June 1, 2016

Q. 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?

A. The State will periodically inspect on a random basis. The City has no authority to do so.

Q. How long will the residents typically reside in the group home; what is the typical turnover rate?

A. The residents are there based on certain goals they wish to achieve (educational, etc) and are all on a self-paced basis. There is no set period.

Q. Will the residents be allowed to move freely with no restrictions around the City of Williamsburg?

A. They will be allowed to move freely without any restrictions or supervision. When they are “signed out,” they are required to check in at least once every hour.

Q. What are the requirements for a home to be a group home and, if the City identifies an alternative location that is suitable, is Gateway willing to move and how quickly?

A. They said we could find the requirements Gateway uses to choose a group home on their web site. They did not answer our question about willingness to move.

Q. What is Gateway's responsibility if one of the group home residents damages neighborhood property or assaults someone in the community

A. Gateway refused to answer.

Additional information that came out of the meeting was:

- The home is owned by a trust for a couple, one of whom is deceased and the other of whom is in an assisted living facility in the Northeast. Thus the principals involved in the transaction are Gateway, their realtor representative (Nachman Realty), and the trustee (Middleburg Bank).
- The protocols for how residents are chosen and the criteria for their selection, and for the behavior requirements while in the group home are posted on the Gateway website. (we have not checked this out.)
- Sister Mary Jean of Walsingham stated that she appreciated the fact that group homes have an important place in our society and in the treatment of mental illness but also said that we should not be offended or surprised to see fences going up around Walsingham soon.

End of meeting