

**MINUTES
CALLED JOINT PUBLIC HEARING WITH PLANNING COMMISSION
November 19, 2024**

Council for the City of Covington held a called meeting with Covington Planning Commission for a public hearing on Tuesday, November 19, 2024 at 4:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall located at 333 W. Locust Street, Covington, Virginia.

Jerry Morgan, Chairman of the Planning Commission, called the Planning Commission meeting to order. The Planning Commission had a quorum in attendance.

Purpose of the joint meeting is to:

1. To hold a public hearing on the following applications:

A) Special exception request of Alleghany Highlands Community Service Board to open a Crisis Intervention Center. The lot is described as 13---112--10-, located at 214 N. Lexington Ave.

B) Rezoning request of Christ United Methodist Church from R-3 to C-1. The lot is described as 14---2-3---1-, located at 200 E. Fudge St.

Two members of Covington City Council were in attendance however there is a need to have three for a quorum. Two members were also attending a ribbon cutting hosted by the Chamber of Commerce in downtown Covington at the same time.

The Planning Commission changed the order of their meeting and began discussing the Comprehensive Plan until the other members of Council joined the meeting. Eric Tyree, Building & Zoning Official, stated that the Planning Commission is reviewing the plan. It is reviewed every 5 years. A citizen asked about the plan getting more employers here in the area. Mr. Tyree advised that the plan is to work on topics for the future, such as environmental, assisting with economic development, the possibility for housing (tiny houses/shipping containers) for possible etc... His office is open on Walnut Street at the former school board office. Mr. Morgan stated that if anyone had ideas to come to a planning commission meeting and the input would be welcomed.

Two members of Council arrived and Mayor Thomas H. Sibold, Jr. called the Covington Council meeting to order with the following members present: Mayor Sibold; Vice Mayor David S. Crosier; Councilman Fred F. Forbes; Councilman William (Lance) Carson, Jr. and Councilman Raymond C. Hunter; absent. Also representing the City Attorney was Attorney, Christopher Dadak.

Mr. Morgan explained that when the public hearing begins those who are in favor of the request will have 3 minutes to speak. He asked that everyone keep it civil and be respectful. The process will be the same for those that are against the request.

Mr. Tyree stated that the building is zoned correctly however the Community Services Board wants to add additional after hour services, they are requesting a special use.

Mr. Sibold asked if Wright Way Motors owned the building and Ms. Barber confirmed they are buying it from them. She stated that this is a project that is much needed in the area. When children go for treatment, out of the area, they are away from their families. There are four steps: accessibility, affordability, availability and acceptability. When there is a transport for treatment, it sometimes is a 4 hour trip to get to a facility. This request would allow the treatment to be in Covington. In the facility, there would be law enforcement and 23 hours or less psychiatric care, eight beds and two beds for children on a separate wing with 22 maximum staff and patients. This would be easier on the Covington and Clifton Forge Police Departments. Ms. Barber stated there would be 22 to 25 employees which would include nurses, aides, law enforcement and administrative staff.

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John Gardner, Architect spoke that he and his wife worked on the architectural plan and showed the layout of the building. Areas are: entrance for deputy to bring and admit a patient to a deputy, card entry at all doors, area for treatment for up to 5 days, area for children with a minimum of two locked doors to go into the building to access any patient and a small area for staff for respite due to this being challenging work.

Mr. Morgan thanked them for the presentation, he opened the public hearing for comments for the Planning Commission and Mr. Sibold open the public hearing for comments for City Council for:

Special exception request of Alleghany Highlands Community Service Board to open a Crisis Intervention Center. The lot is described as 13---112--10-, located at 214 N. Lexington Ave.

Sheriff, Kyle Moore thanked everyone for attending, he stated that he is in favor of this project. He explained that when they transport emergency patients, it sometimes is halfway across Virginia. This is budget challenging and uses overtime pay and use of vehicles. Deputies sometimes sitting in the ER with a transport for 8 hours. A lot of these patients could obtain help with this project. Mr. Moore would like to be on record that he is for this project.

Dr. David Crandall spoke about being a former physician at Alleghany Regional Hospital. He is on the Alleghany Foundation board. He is on record for this project. When ER has a crisis and a patient is waiting for hours or days for a bed it is difficult for everyone. This community needs this project.

Greg Howard spoke that in 2016 he was in need of the Community Services Board assistance and they are instrumental in saving his life. He doesn't remember being in the ER and was told that he said things that he had never said before and that it took 7 hours for them to get him to Salem for treatment. He noted that sometimes people just need some assistance and was thankful that he was allowed to speak.

Greg Madsen with the hospital stated that he supports this project and runs three hospitals in Virginia and others outside of Virginia. He stated that when the ER fills up, other patients cannot be seen as fast and this is a much needed program for this area.

Nicole Tucker spoke that there are millions who experience mental health issues and she would like to have this program which would give opportunity to those who need help. The local hospitals have some programs however some are underpaid and understaffed. This program is much needed and she asked Council to carefully consider approving this program.

Jordan Reynolds has had to use this program, he works with peer recovery. He has 5 years experience and does not want to see kids away from their families. If treated locally it builds trust, CSB saved his life. When children are away from their families it affects everyone.

Rebecca Leichter is an RN critical care nurse, she sees many in need in the area, there is limited resources and it is difficult to find somewhere nearby for a patient to go. A parent has to stay with the child and it can be difficult. She fully supports this program.

Edwin Entsminger spoke that he owns property in the area. He knows that this is a much needed program, due to his EMS/Nursing experiences. He is against this request because he believes this building is too small and there needs to be a larger building in another area. He needed assistance in 2020, he knows this is a wonderful program but if the money is put into the building it may end up having to be sold to get a large enough facility. He thanked everyone for their time.

Mr. Morgan closed the Planning Commission public hearing. Mr. Sibold closed the City Council public hearing.

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Mr. Forbes asked about the medication and Ms. Barber mentioned that there is a state of the art prescription machine however if meds are not available they call CVS pharmacy. If a patient goes to a state facility they are given only two days of medicine and released and this is not enough. Ms. Barber mentioned that there would be three 12-hour shifts and then staff would have days off. CIT pays for three deputies. Police Chief, Chris Smith, who was in attendance, was asked if the facility would increase having more staff and he said that he does not anticipate any increasing of his staff to be needed. Ms. Barber stated there should be no increase in traffic. The deputies will take custody of the patient at the building from another deputy. Mr. Morgan asked about increased lighting for the building and it was stated that there will not be any light going directly into a home. Staff would use door swipes to enter the building, there will be cameras in hallways and corridors but not in the treatment area. The CSB would continue to be serving patients at the CSB office from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The new building would be for emergency services, after hours. Another staff member mentioned that at other large facilities the state mandates 16 beds in Virginia and they cannot use them all. The building was sold to CSB for \$425,000.

Mr. Morgan asked if there would be a motion and a motion was made and Planning Commission members all voted to approve and recommended this project to City Council.

Mr. Sibold asked Council about a motion. Mr. Forbes made a motion to approve the project, Mr. Carson seconded the motion. Mr. Sibold mentioned he is not ready to vote on this and would like to resend the motion and second to table this until December. Stephanie Clark asked what is the concern and needing to table this decision to December. Mr. Sibold stated that they only heard from one person living in the area and the other were mostly board members or staff. Ms. Clark stated that others were planning to attend that were in favor of the request and were not able to attend. Mr. Tyree stated that letters went out to all surrounding homes/businesses, and advertisements were put in two newspapers.

Ms. Barber stated there is no need to have another meeting and that the CSB rescinds the request and they will do the 23-hour facility instead, another vote is not needed. Mr. Sibold asked if she would like to wait and decide later and Ms. Barber responded no.

Mr. Morgan and Mr. Sibold closed the public hearing and took a 5 minute recess before beginning the next public hearing.

Mr. Morgan and Mr. Sibold continued the meeting after the recess.

Eric Tyree spoke about the church wanting to lease the property for commercial use and rezone it to C-1. Reverend Doug Forester spoke that there were eight remaining members of the church and they decided to close the church but wanted it to be continued as a way to bless the community. Tammy Wilson, Director of Social Services had contacted him. She advised him that they had a need for office space to have a better building for employees.

Pastor Janelle Watson spoke that they wanted to work together to strengthen and support the community and the condition of the current Social Services building was a concern and they are here to bless their neighbors. They wanted to offer the space and would like to help the community.

Mr. Morgan thanked them for the presentation, he opened the public hearing for comments for the Planning Commission and Mr. Sibold open the public hearing for comments for City Council for:

Rezoning request of Christ United Methodist Church from R-3 to C-1. The lot is described as 14---2-3--
-1-, located at 200 E. Fudge St. Mr. Morgan opened the public hearing

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Bill Wilbur, member of the church, stated that they had the real estate and would like to help the community and the church is in good condition, he is for the project. They have been there since 1929 and would like to serve the area and all work together.

Mr. Morgan asked if anyone is against the project.

Bernie Moncrief asked that if Social Services came to the church, what other businesses would want to come there. He is concerned about traffic. Eric Tyree spoke that all the neighbors were notified in the area and they always send more letters than what is required. Mr. Moncrief is opposed of the request and believes it would cause a lot of traffic.

Danny Smith of Beverly Avenue stated that he would not like to see a change, if there was any alternative.

Susan Crowder asked if it was the entire staff moving from Social Services to the building. It was stated that it is.

Robert Long stated that he is for Christian help however the traffic is a concern and the alley is not maintained well.

Mr. Moncrief asked about construction to put in offices in the former church. Mr. Crosier stated that they would be using cubicles to create offices.

Mr. Carson asked what the hours of operation would be. It was noted that it would be open 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. unless someone would get a call for an emergency. That would be the only time anyone would be at the building after 5 pm. Social Services offers a lot of telework they have 39 workers and usually 14 are on site.

It was discussed that the current parking lot has only a portion of it paved, it is a larger lot than it appears. Mr. Morgan suggested that the city consider a crosswalk if there is not already one there. Mr. Tyree stated that it is not legal to block a parking space off in front of a home for a specific person to use it.

Social Services plans to install a chair lift and Mr. Tyree mentioned a permit will be needed.


With no further discussion Mr. Morgan asked Planning Commission for a motion. Motion was made to allow the special exception request for the church, a second was made and Mr. Morgan confirmed to City Council they recommend this change to City Council.

Mr. Sibold asked Council for a motion. Mr. Crosier made a motion for the special exception for this use seconded by Mr. Carson.

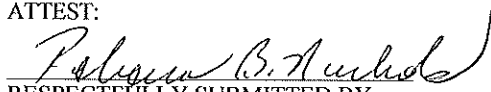
The roll call votes were as follows: Mr. Carson, for; Mr. Forbes, for; Vice Mayor Crosier, for; Mayor Sibold, for. Mr. Hunter, Absent.

So moved, both the Planning Commission and City Council approved the change. The public hearing was closed.

With no further business to come before Council, the meeting was adjourned by consensus.


THOMAS H. SIBOLD, JR., MAYOR

ATTEST:


RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY
REBECCA BRATTON NUCKOLS, ACTING CITY CLERK