

**CITY OF NORTHFIELD WORK SESSION
MARCH 8, 2022**

At 6:02pm this meeting was called to order by Municipal Clerk, Mary Canesi. This meeting was properly advertised in the Press of Atlantic City on January 8, 2022, in accordance with Public Law 1975, Chapter 231.

FLAG SALUTE

The flag salute was led by Council President Polistina.

ROLL CALL

Present (in person): Councilwoman Bucci; Councilman Leeds; Councilman Notaro; Councilman Smith; Councilman Utts; Council President Polistina;

Absent: Councilman Dewees; Mayor Chau*

**Mayor Chau arrived at 7:42pm.*

Solicitor Facenda, Engineer Nassar and Chief Newman were also in attendance.

Council President Polistina moved to Committee Reports.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Councilman Dewees – Buildings/Grounds, Athletic Fields; Birch Grove Park, Bike Path, 1st Street Playground, Veterans Park; Public Works: Roads, Engineering, Sewer Operations

Councilman Dewees was absent.

Councilman Utts - Inspections, Code Enforcement, Housing/Zoning, Cultural Committee, Veteran Liaison, Mainland Regional, Technology / MRHS Channel; Planning Board

Councilman Utts reported that he met with the Cultural Committee; they are planning the 4th of July Parade and are accepting nominations for Miss or Mister 4th of July. The Planning Board heard a “D” variance that was postponed.

Councilman Notaro - Fire Department/EMS; Sewer Operations; Northfield Sports (FAN)

Councilman Notaro reported that Councilman Leeds would deliver the EMS report; EMS was doing a fine job, response times were down. He commended them for a job well done and for responses for mutual aid. He also met with Councilman Utts and the Cultural Committee; they were a great organization who do a lot for the town.

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Regarding FAN, Councilman Notaro offered congratulations to the boys and girls basketball teams for their achievements.

Councilman Leeds – Economic Development / Chamber of Commerce

Councilman Leeds read the following EMS report for February: 134 calls for service with an average response time of five minutes; 52 times our ambulance provided mutual aid (10 to EHT, 26 to Pleasantville and 16 to Somers Point); Northfield received mutual aid 14 times. The Office of Emergency Management was in the process of planning a required drill, it would take about 18 months to plan.

Councilman Smith - Court / Violations; Little League and Babe Ruth, Northfield Community School; Shared Services

Councilman Smith reported Northfield Little League and Babe Ruth seasons were underway. April 4th was the official start date and opening day was scheduled for the 9th; all have been extended an invitation to attend. It was a busy day, including Purple Heart Way, and the Northfield Mothers' League Easter Egg Hunt.

Councilman Utts added, the Cultural Committee would be holding their flea market on that date as well.

Councilman Smith attended the Northfield Community School Board of Education meeting. This was the first week without a mask requirement at the school.

Councilwoman Bucci – Insurance and Safety; Library; Municipal Alliance

Councilwoman Bucci offered condolences to the Beattie family; they lost their 27-year-old son Kyle a few weeks ago. There was no update for Insurance and Safety. The next Municipal Alliance meeting date is scheduled for April 21st. She announced the “Coffee with a Cop” event, being held on March 26th.

Council President Polistina – Finance and Collections; Senior Citizens

Council President Polistina reported our next budget meeting was being held this week. The Senior Committee had not met yet, but hoped to, soon.

Council President Polistina moved to old business.

WORK SESSION / TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION – PRIOR BUSINESS

- Northfield Avenue at Rt 9 Drainage –*Update* from Engineer Nassar*
- Stormwater Facilities Shared with the County of Atlantic – *Update* from Engineer Nassar*

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- Potential Acquisition of Fire Truck – *Bid Specifications Pending from Chief Cummings*
- Potential Public Auction of City Owned Property Block 66 Lot 11 – *Pending*

Engineer Nassar advised he had maps from the County and would review them for shared-drainage mains.

Clerk Canesi advised there was no update on the auction.

WORK SESSION / TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION – NEW BUSINESS

- Standing Item – New Grant Opportunities

There were no new grant opportunities presented.

Council President Polistina moved to the regular agenda.

REVIEW OF REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

Council President Polistina reviewed the Regular Meeting agenda.

Council President Polistina noted the addition of Resolution 83-2022 for Central Court, he distributed copies to Council and for the public. The Resolution was for budgeting purposes, in the event of a shortfall or an overage. It was not in the original resolution or proposal, but would be added tonight. CFO Stollenwerk had reviewed and had no concerns.

Councilman Notaro asked if Solicitor Facenda reviewed it.

Solicitor Facenda replied, yes. Mayor Chau did vote for it during the governance committee meeting, and Solicitor Facenda had no issues with it.

Councilman Leeds asked that Resolution 72-2022 be voted on separately.

Council President Polistina made the assignments.

PUBLIC SESSION/ FIVE MINUTES PER SPEAKER

Council President Polistina opened this portion of the meeting for any member of the public to speak on any topic; he noted a five-minute limit per speaker.

Anthony Paoella, 521 Fuae Avenue, Northfield, asked about lights on the bike path, and said no one answers phone. His second concern was the halfway house behind his house. Was this about money?

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Council President Polistina replied that the lights were out, and had been repaired but are now out again. The electrician has been called back.

Council President Polistina announced that we are not notified that these houses are coming in, the City has no knowledge or control. The only time we are notified is if there is work done that requires a permit. The residents of these homes, which Council President Polistina believed to be a Sober Living Home. This was voluntary. It was not court ordered. Addiction is protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act. The DCA (*Department of Community Affairs*) was the agency that oversees these homes.

Mr. Paoella reiterated that there were children in the area, now he has heroin addicts. He wanted security. He wanted a fence. He would get a lawyer. The residents in his neighborhood were treated like second-class citizens. The curbing on Fuae Avenue stopped before his neighborhood. The real estate values for every home in the neighborhood dropped \$100,000.

William Schmincke, 132 Independence Trail, Egg Harbor Township, announced he was the co-founder of Stop the Heroin, with his wife, Tammy. He provided a history of the formation of the organization. Six years ago this week, they lost their son to overdose. Their goal was to help people, in their son's memory. The address of the home had been posted on social media, which infuriated Mr. Schmincke. It has since been taken down. He could only speak on behalf of Stop the Heroin. They want to be accepted; the residents of the homes want to be accepted. Most were coming right from treatment and were seeking a safe, accountable, non-judgmental environment so they could take the next step. The homes were run in a strict manner; the residents were either working or were doing community service. There were cameras inside and outside the home; he had ten homes throughout Atlantic and surrounding counties. The organization was very well respected. They follow all of the rules. Recovery was required. There were curfews. No one sleeps there that does not live there.

Council President Polistina asked if this particular home was Mr. Schmincke's?

Mr. Schmincke replied, yes.

Councilman Utts asked Mr. Schmincke how he ensured residents maintain sobriety, and what happens when they don't?

Mr. Schmincke replied that they have a district manager who oversees all of the houses. They must go to meetings, there was drug testing, and the other people in the home. All residents must sign a 14-page contract upon admission. If they cannot follow the rules, they must leave the home. In the case of a relapse, they are taken for treatment.

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Solicitor Facenda asked Mr. Schmincke if he was licensed?

Mr. Schmincke replied, yes, by the DCA.

Solicitor Facenda asked for an explanation of the process for licensure.

Mr. Schmincke replied they must be a single-family residence. Must have a live-in manager. Homes are inspected by DCA for health and safety.

Solicitor Facenda asked if this was the DCA process that is used for each home?

Mr. Schmincke replied, yes.

Solicitor Facenda asked if he was familiar with state and federal rules?

Mr. Schmincke replied, yes.

Solicitor Facenda asked what was his interaction with a municipality?

Mr. Schmincke replied; saying, this is with most respect, once they are licensed by the DCA, they only go through the DCA.

Solicitor Facenda asked for confirmation that, in Mr. Schmincke's experience, there is little to no oversight on the part of the municipality.

Mr. Schmincke replied, that was correct.

Councilman Smith asked how many residents can live there, and is there any community outreach as far as neighborhoods?

Mr. Schmincke replied; to answer the second question first, no. If it weren't for social media, many residents wouldn't know they were there. He repeated the rules, curfew, no loud music, etc. As to number of occupants, they put two people in a room for purposes of accountability and to reduce isolation. The DCA allows up to 11 people regardless of number of bedrooms. If there were 13 bedrooms it is still an 11-person max.

Councilman Smith asked if a house manager lived there, full time? Was he an employee?

Mr. Schmincke replied; he does not live there but was there daily. They also watched the cameras. Yes, they were an employee. Residents must call and check in every night at 11pm.

Councilman Notaro asked Mr. Schmincke if he was adding bedrooms?

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Mr. Schmincke replied, no. Sometimes they modify with walls, but have never had to add to the home.

Councilman Leeds asked what is to stop someone from leaving after they call in.

Chris Houser, 614 Ohio Avenue, Absecon, and an employee of Stop the Heroin, replied. The cell phones have a geo fence around them.

Anthony Sporano, 519 Fuae Avenue, Northfield, commended Mr. Schmincke and his organization, but said parking was a concern because of the location of this property. Was there a landscaper that would keep the property neat and clean? How long was the average stay? Was it a revolving door, in and out? Do any of these men have issues other than substance abuse? Was anyone coming from incarceration and is maybe a Megan's Law issue?

Mr. Schmincke replied there could be people coming from jail but it was part of the process, if they are on probation there would be a probation officer visiting. Homes were well maintained including landscaping. He would love to have everyone there for a year, but closer to six months was more accurate. Some have been there for two to three years. Some get on a bus and never come back; not often but it has happened. Most of these people have nowhere else to go.

Mr. Houser added that 80% of their homes have a six-to-eight-month occupancy. Ten to fifteen percent fluctuate but the 80% holds the standard.

Tom Glenn, 609 Pine Street, Northfield, asked about a comment that was made at the beginning of the meeting. There was something about the Planning Board?

Councilman Utts replied; on Northfield Avenue, a medical professional office had been granted a continuance.

Mr. Glenn felt the whole process was slipped in, he just heard about it a week ago. He asked Mr. Schmincke how much money he makes.

Mr. Schmincke responded that was irrelevant.

Conversation in the room began to get heated; many people talking at the same time, over one another.

Solicitor Facenda cautioned that attendees maintain civility, or the group can move in to the hall, with Police Chief Newman.

Mr. Glenn again asked how much money Mr. Schmincke makes.

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Mr. Schmincke replied there were recovering people living in our homes, but every one of you has a neighbor that is in recovery.

Alicia Garry, 202 St. James Place, Northfield, at a previous budget workshop, ARPA (*American Rescue Plan Act*) funds were discussed she felt that the money should be distributed around town. She believed insufficient money was spent on the First Street Playground. She suggested pickle ball by the First Street Playground. She felt ARPA funds should offset the tax rate. She did speak to Qwin Vitale but the lights have been out for three weeks. It's very dark. She supported sober living but not in this location. This was not a typical single-family occupancy. There was insufficient parking, cars running stop signs, there were small children and people with pets. If residents don't have cars, how do they go to their jobs, how do they see their sponsors? She asked that Council reach out to legislators to limit the number of sober living homes allowed in any one municipality. She stated there were 11 sober living homes in Northfield. She did not believe there was nothing you can do at the municipal level; Council can change the law but had to work hard at it. She reiterated that she was in favor of sober living, but the location of this home makes it unfavorable. She wished the neighbors would have known.

David Hayden, 217 Franklin Avenue, Northfield, stated he was a father and six-year resident of the neighborhood. He was 14 years sober, in recovery. He does interventions, at no cost, that is what he does, his 'give' back. He heard about the home from neighbors, not on Facebook. This home touched seven properties. There were a lot of kids. He had no issues with the Schminckes and Stop the Heroin. The issue here was house-placement. Heroin had the lowest amount of recovery success. The residents were going to be on the second-floor deck, there would be language, smoking. This is the last place the house should be.

Marilyn Lynch, 521 Pine Street, Northfield, stated she is a recovering heroin addict, ten-years clean. She read from a prepared letter; she purchased her home on Pine Street, she had a six-year-old with disabilities. She said she was misled by the new owner of the property who said he was going to live there, but she now knows the home is being gifted to Stop the Heroin. She wanted more information. Are they also purchasing 519 Pine Street? She felt she had to consider selling her home. She had nothing against sober living homes, but a class F cooperative residence sounds very different.

Mr. Schmincke advised Mrs. Lynch that he would be happy to answer questions. He also clarified that Mrs. Lynch had never spoke with him previously.

Tammy Schmincke, 132 Independence Trail, Egg Harbor Township, stated these homes are set up as if they were for her son. She believed she was being maligned. She invited anyone from the Council to visit; there was never loud music, never a party. She was working so other parents would never get the phone call she got, to tell them their son was dead. She was not getting rich on this. She now understood

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this was a disease of the mind, without the right tools people can never get right. She was very sorry she upset the community this way. She reminded all that these were human beings.

Gene O'Dowd, 117 Lees Lane, Egg Harbor Township, felt this was snuck in. He asked how many people can live in a single-family residence.

Solicitor Facenda reiterated that it had already been established that the municipality had no say in how many people occupy these homes. The class F license permits the occupancy.

Mr. O'Dowd asked how the Fire Department felt about that many people in a home?

Council President Polistina reiterated that this was a DCA-regulated entity.

Councilman Notaro felt it was a good idea to let the Fire Department know how many people were in the home.

Solicitor Facenda announced that the issues that many of those present were having were not with the City of Northfield, they were with the State of NJ. He suggested they contact their state legislator.

Lisa Eachus, 4206 Dolphin Avenue, Northfield. Said she just moved there; she had previously lived on Lesley Lane for 30 years. Many people know her. Ten years ago, she lost her child to an overdose. She lived with it every day. This saddens her because everyone here was so quick to say, we want people to get well, but not in my neighborhood. She raised her son, in her neighborhood. In a block with 22 children. He suffered from a disease. She would have loved for her son to have been able to go in to sober living with Stop the Heroin 10 years ago. Had her son been able to go into sober living, he may still be here. Living with substance abuse does not make a person a robber, or rapist, or on a Megan's Law list. She has been in the mental health field for 25 years; she is now a recovery specialist. She had been in Bill's homes. She raised a child who lived with substance abuse, and she was all of your neighbors. We live in a generation where it's me, me, me. This may be an opportunity to teach your children compassion.

Kevin O'Dowd, Kennett Square, PA, said he grew up in Northfield. He was here on behalf of his grandfather Gene O'Dowd, Sr. There was a sense of unfairness here, it was not the fault of the Schmincke's, but the taxpayers have legitimate concerns. He said he did research and fifty percent of recovery efforts fail. There would be failures and that was a concern. He reiterated that the Pine Street location was inappropriate. This was 500 feet from a playground. He felt City Council needed to step up and own the unfairness to the neighbors of homes like this. Were there limits to the number of homes? Was there any recourse? There needed to be some leadership. He

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asked the Council what actions would be taken to address the proximity to the playground? What recourse do the homeowners have?

Council President Polistina advised we could contact the DCA to make sure they were running in compliance with the law. We as residents and as members of the Council don't get any notice. What can we do? Council President Polistina didn't know. Mrs. Garry make a good point, maybe we can contact our legislators to ask them to regulate it. It's never going to be the right location for the people who live next door.

Bill Garry, 202 St. James, Northfield, said he was here to talk to the Council about traffic but that he wasn't going to do that now. Egg Harbor City had enacted zoning laws to regulate sober living homes. Mr. Garry said local zoning enforcement was the responsibility of the municipality. He suggested someone from Council get on the phone with DCA. As of March 25th, the City's "say" in the matter would expire.

Council President Polistina told all in attendance to be civil; we would end the meeting if needed.

Jessica Murphy, 399 First Street, Northfield, felt she owed it to her children to say her piece. She read from a prepared letter; she asked all to imagine a time where kids could just be kids. She did not feel the Pine Street home was an appropriate location based on the nature of recovery and the presence of children. She also urged a playground design that included two-to-twelve-year-old children.

Joe Lynch, 521 Pine Street, Northfield, apologized for the earlier outburst. To the Schmincke's, he said he was sorry for the loss of their child. There was a lot of fear; people just want to protect their children.

Mr. Schmincke advised he had been doing this for five years, in beautiful neighborhoods; he had never had issues.

Mr. Lynch felt it was very hard to trust someone who was addicted to heroin. He didn't understand why they haven't reached out to the community.

Mr. Schmincke said he had never encountered this before. He appreciated the opportunity.

David Gelona, 501 Fuae Avenue, Northfield, his family had lived in the house for 72 years. He had the utmost compassion for this family, but there was a time and place for everything and this was not the place. In addition to children there were many elderly individuals. Why was Mr. Schmincke putting the neighbors at risk? The odds of relapse are too great. He urged Council to strengthen with laws.

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Dave Jones, 314 Booye Terrace, Northfield, has five kids, one with a drug problem and they took care of it. He had tremendous compassion for the Schmincke's. He asked why they didn't bring neighbors from some of the other homes to explain to us? He asked Council if they would like this near their homes.

Council President Polistina said he understood what was being said. Council was trying to figure out what would work best; it's not going away, people are using. Councilwoman Bucci just mentioned someone that passed away last week. We would do what we can to keep everybody safe. That's our job.

Rich Harden, 613 Pine Street, Northfield, felt all has been covered except security. Without a live-in manager, who was to say they aren't going to go in the bathroom and do something and then wander around.

Mr. Schmincke replied, if that's one of the individuals in the home, the others are going to hold him accountable.

**Mayor Chau arrived at 7:42pm.*

Mr. House added, this could occur at anyone's home.

Mr. Schmincke noted that those who relapse are asked to leave. He urged those present to take into account that this is what they do.

Council President Polistina asked about the selection process for residents.

Mr. Schmincke advised that certain medications aren't allowed in the house; it doesn't even have to be a controlled substance.

Eric Carrier, 606 West Mill Road, Northfield, via Zoom chat – how many are in Northfield and is 650 Hollywood one of them?

Mr. Schmincke replied, three, and no.

Renee Carfagno, 27 Fifield Avenue, Northfield via Zoom chat – it was mentioned that a house manager oversees the male houses through a telephone but they do not live within the houses. When they wait for public transportation they are within feet of bus stops where young children are also waiting. What supervision is in place to protect our children?"

Solicitor Facenda replied they were subject to regular law enforcement rules and regulations.

Mr. Schmincke added, one of the residents is the house President. But, everyone in the house takes that role.

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Solicitor Facenda asked Mr. Schmincke if there was a contact for residents?

Mr. Schmincke advised Solicitor Facenda that all of the information was on their website or they can call 609-892-4582.

Erich Hegenbart, 710 Hollywood Drive, Northfield, via Zoom chat – if the house on Hollywood Drive isn't a Stop the Heroin house, then what classification is that house?

Council President Polistina advised we do not know as we are not notified.

Tammy Rickert, 412 Fairbanks Avenue, Northfield, via Zoom chat – is it legal to be in that close proximity to a playground and how many are there in Northfield?

Council President Polistina replied, yes, it's legal and no we don't know.

Nicole Edge, 610 Hollywood Drive, Northfield, via Zoom and speaking by telephone – said she was reading from a prepared letter. She called City Hall recently and the woman she spoke with was rude and refused to answer questions. She was told not to call back. She is not against sober living homes but wants facts. Feels she has right to ask and she should not be made to feel bad if she had questions. She later found out who is running this particular home and got questions answered; she feels better about it now. When secrets are kept everyone assumes the worst; speculation and personal attacks could have been spared if people were made aware. She hopes all can work together moving forward.

Clerk Canesi then read aloud, three letters that had been submitted in advance of the meeting; summarized as follows:

1. Tony Granieri, 104 Haddon Avenue, Northfield. He and his family have lived there for six years, with five young children and spend a great deal of time outdoors. Their home is close to 517 Pine Street and in the path they take to the First Street Playground. He is urging City Council to reject the proposal. As parents they have responsibility to keep children safe; occupants of this home will be known substance-abusers. Too many children in this area. These people have struggled to make good choices, what will they do when they relapse? Break into neighboring homes or get a ride from someone driving drunk? Council is elected to listen to constituents; he sympathizes with their struggles but does not want this in his neighborhood.
2. Raymond and Rosemarie DePhillips, 301 First Street, Northfield. Regarding the sober living home coming to 517 Pine Street, families with children and seniors are concerned about the risks associated with this home. It is too close to a playground. They have lived here for close to 60 years.

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3. Scott and Megan Aspenberg, 651 Hollywood Drive, thanked Council for opportunity to voice concerns about increase in sober living homes in Northfield, and in particular one near their home. They have no issues with these people but feel Northfield was not transparent or professional in handling these homes. They spoke with Zoning and Code Enforcement and were told there were no zoning changes; Code Enforcement was helpful and said home had been taken over by the state and nothing could be done. The City Hall clerk would not provide any information and belittled the Aspenbergs for asking questions. They are concerned that City employees have no knowledge. How can companies circumvent laws? They want to know what will be done in the future to make process more transparent.

Eric Carrier, 606 West Mill Road, via Zoom chat – can the residents of Northfield obtain a current list of addresses for Sober Living Homes?

Chris Paisley, 397 First Street, Northfield, via Zoom chat – is a parent and lives near the park. This company has done a horrible job responding to any real questions tonight. Recovery home should not be close to a park or a neighborhood with many children. Company should have proactively advised the neighbors; no positives have been stated.

Dom Cappella, 2413 Shepherd Circle, Northfield, said as of right now, there is nothing that can be done? Is that what we determined here tonight?

Council President Polistina replied, yes.

Mr. Cappella spoke directly to Mr. Schmincke and said he was sorry for the loss of the Schmincke's son. He commented that you can put a sober living home in a million-dollar home on the beach in Margate. He was a retired police officer.

Alicia Garry, 202 St. James Place, Northfield, understands there was nothing we can do about this house coming to Northfield. At a municipal level we need to take a look at the EHC ordinances.

Tom Glenn, 609 Pine Street, Northfield, the whole thing is trouble, you snuck it in. Have the Schmincke's spoken to the police department? If not, why not?

Mr. Schmincke replied, we are not required to.

Council President Polistina added that going forward maybe that is something that would happen.

Nicole Edge, 610 Hollywood Drive, Northfield via Zoom chat – what can we do about having a sober living house in a school zone, near Birch Grove Park where all of our children play sports? How is this allowed?

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Council President Polistina advised that we have found that some towns have ordinances that we can look at.

Seeing no one wishing to speak, Council President Polistina closed the public session.

At 8:10pm, on a motion of Councilman Notaro, seconded by Councilman Utts, all members present were in favor of adjourning this meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Canesi, RMC, Municipal Clerk