



CITY OF CONNEAUT

HOUSING/ZONING OFFICE

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Planning Commission Meeting Minutes August 6, 2019

The Conneaut Planning Commission met for their regular monthly meeting on August 6, 2019 beginning at 6:00 pm. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Role was called; in attendance were Ms. Notte, Mr. Zingaro and Mrs. Gaugh, Ms. Berry, Mr. Sedmak, and Mrs. Parlongo. This was Paul Sedmak's last meeting as a Planning Commission member.

Mr. Zingaro asked if everyone had read the minutes from the July 2nd meeting and asked for corrections or a motion to approve. Mrs. Parlongo made a motion to approve, seconded by Mrs. Gaugh. Ms. Shubitowski then pointed out that Mrs. Spencer had been omitted from the roster of attendees. All were in favor with the correction/addition of Mrs. Spencer, motion carried.

Mr. Zingaro then asked Mrs. Gaugh to address a concern she had mentioned concerning the outdoor storage center on Center Road. Mrs. Gaugh stated the area was a mess. He had put the fence up, but it did not have the agreed upon screening, and there were no trash cans, although she had not seen any trash littering the property. She asked "if we (Planning Commission) ok's plans and they don't stick to the plans, then why are we bothering?" Ms. Shubitowski said she would check it out on her next work day. Mrs. Brown was not in attendance to offer any insight to what she might have known. Mr. Zingaro stated that the Planning Commission had given him two years, and it was coming up on the end of the first year. Discussion was made concerning hopes that Truck World would keep their promises, and that both Dollar Generals had also been neglecting to keep up their properties. Ms. Shubitowski cited that both Dollar General stores were on the mow list, as they had both neglected to keep up their properties. Mr. Zingaro stated that it would be in Truck World's best interest to act as they say, as they have bigger plans in the future for the properties.

Old Business – Bed & Breakfast:

Dave Owens, owner of Gull Haven Vacation Rentals at 969 Buffalo St. and Rawley Huskey, owner of the Centennial Inn at 534 Main Street were present to give insight from the view of B&B owners. Mr. Owens spoke first and stated he had gone over the recommendations from CT

Consultants and was totally in compliance with it and any amendments, but stated he did have some concerns. His first concern was about exterior appearance but his concern was about neighboring properties to the B&B's. He specifically cited the house next door owned by Felix Stanis that has poison ivy, gaps in the chimney and overgrown hedges. Ms. Shubitowski said that she has cited that house several times, and would investigate current conditions. His other concern began with ORC 731.05 which gives hotel definitions. The revised code defines a hotel as anything with more than five sleeping rooms. Mr. Owens said that "everything in your documentation says four or fewer rooms for a bed and breakfast or vacation house." "Shouldn't Conneaut's say five or fewer like the Ohio Revised Code?"

Ms. Notte said that the language she read when she drafted the language, she saw that hotels were defined as five or more. "That's why I adjusted it to four, so we just need to clarify the source of the material and make the adjustment."

Mr. Owens: Another issue is parking on the street. This is another issue of consistency. We have Arlene's on Broadway, and I'm not complaining about Arlene's or Sparky's, but things need to be consistent. With Arlene's the Congregational Church does not permit parking in their lot, so Arlene's is forced to park on Buffalo St. and Monroe St.

Mrs. Parlongo: I don't think that's true, the church does allow them to park there.

Mr. Owens: At any rate, Sparky's tore down a house on Buffalo St. and put a parking lot in there, but there's still a lot of parking on Erie and Buffalo Streets, and they park across the street at the credit union too. Sparky's is a real class act, I'm not complaining about anything. The noise should not exceed the Conneaut noise limit, which I believe is two hundred feet from any source, you shouldn't be able to hear it at two hundred feet. Sparky's is a half mile from my house, I can hear them.

Ms. Notte: My question is, is that music or just the crowd?

Mr. Owens: Just music. But, just for consistency, special events is another one. I heard if you have a bed and breakfast, you couldn't have a wedding and a reception at your bed & breakfast. When my brother got married in Cincinnati, they had the reception at a B&B. I don't know why you couldn't have a family reunion or whatever at a B&B or vacation home.

Mr. Zingaro: That's the first time I ever heard that.

Ms. Notte: Perhaps there's something we can build in, I don't know if there's a noise ordinance or some kind of noise permit you'd have to get for a party in an area that you normally wouldn't be able to.

Mr. Owens: My point is some kind of consistency.

Mr. Zingaro: Have the neighbors complained about parking?

Ms. Shubitowski: First I've heard, and Conneaut doesn't necessarily have a noise ordinance, per se. There's nothing about a decibel level or anything, and anything that does mention noise is in the police code.

Mr. Owens: One other thing about parkin. I know of one other bed and breakfast that has no on street parking. There's another one that the ordinance says there's no parking in front of the building. Well, there's a local B&B that only has parking in front of the building, it's impossible to park behind their building.

Mr. Zingaro: The intent is not to make anyone operating a B&B now to change anything drastically.

Mrs. Gaugh: We have no clue, I mean, we don't even know how many bed and breakfasts we have.

Mr. Owens: You should if they're doing things correctly.

Ms. Shubitowski: And that's why we're here.

Mr. Zingaro: We want to make the community attractive to B&B's and we want people to stay here, and we're also concerned about the safety and well being of the renters. We don't want to be splashed across the headlines, fire at bed and breakfast.

Ms. Notte: If I'm correct, Connie Naylor stated that this type of lodging is the backbone of our area. We want to make it an option for people to offer their homes and do it in a safe way, not a cost prohibitive fashion.

Mr. Zingaro: We want to make sure that the bed and breakfasts we have now and future bed and breakfasts can co-exist. We understand that there's some place that have to be grandfathered in, no two ways about it.

Mrs. Gaugh: And we're flying blind, so your input helps a lot.

Mr. Huskey: And talking about parking, I had a customer last night, they parked in the street, and I do have parking in my driveway. Do I tell them, you're not allowed to park there?

Ms. Shubitowski: Well, parking is permitted on your side of the street.

Mr. Huskey: But if it's in here that parking isn't allowed on the street...

Mrs. Parlongo: Unfortunately, Conneaut being an older community, that is one of the difficulties for parking anyplace, really.

Mr. Zingaro: And we've had problems with loading zones. Dominos, poor fella has to park on Broad Street to unload that semi, which, really you're not supposed to park there, but he has to.

Ms. Notte: So it's really trying to find the right balance. Typically when a guest arrives, is there some kind of instruction sheet?

Mr. Huskey: We went on Expedia this year. We don't get any information from Expedia, just name and usually a phone number. We don't get an e-mail address. The e-mail address we get is to them (Expedia).

Mrs. Spencer: So you're a third party?

Mr. Huskey: We are a third party. I try to keep records of what I can.

Ms. Notte: Is that something you would ask upon arrival?

Mr. Huskey: We've been trying to do all the bookings ahead of time.

Mrs. Parlongo: You do have a guest book for them to register when they come in?

Mr. Huskey: I do what I can, I keep an Excel spreadsheet. We do have a book where they can sign, give comments, stuff like that. We haven't had them give name and address.

Mr. Zingaro: Is there a problem with doing that?

Mr. Huskey: I don't know. We do have our own website as well, and on there we do get all that, but through Expedia, we don't get it. It could be they have it, I'm sure they do.

Mr. Owens: I do credit cards through Paypal, and Paypal gives me all that information. I like the idea of a requirement for the guests registering. I think I've got all that information on everybody, but it would be nice to be able to require that, and there's no reason why not. On our trash dumpster, I have a big sign in in bold letters, all trash must be bagged. They can't read. For first time visitors, we charge a damage deposit. There was a group that not only filled the trash cans with fish cleaning waste, which I also say, no fish cleaning waste, they not only filled it once, but they had a giant bag on top. I had to put that stuff, maggots and all in my car and take it to the transfer station in Ashtabula.

Ms. Notte: What we're looking for are bed and breakfast and short term rental owners like you that, when you have irresponsible guests, you do what you need to do.

Mr. Zingaro: What is the typical stay? Maybe the longest, not the shortest.

Mr. Owens: The longest one was a month. New Lutheran ministers. The longest typical is ten days. The longest normal is seven. I have a two-day minimum, so it varies from two days to three or four days.

Mr. Zingaro: You see that year-round?

Mr. Owens: No.

Mr. Huskey: The majority of ours are one or two days.

Mr. Zingaro: Year-round?

Mr. Huskey: I wish. In the winter time it's real slow.

Mr. Owens: That's one of the issues I have is this mythical Lakeview Park Hotel. Back when you look at the Lakeview Park Hotel, it was a frame building that burned down in the 40's or 30's, if you look at the (inaudible) it says occupied by manager and family all year, guests from April to September, I think. So, our business is essentially May to October. So, for anybody to think that a hotel chain is going to come here and build a hotel at their expense that is empty six months out of the year, it's ludicrous. I went to a camp a few years ago and there was a woman there from Martha's Vineyard. I said, do you have a hotel at Martha's Vineyard, because the weather tends to get very nasty there. She said we have no more hotels at Martha's Vineyard. She said you can rent a house there in the summer for \$4,000 a week, and in the winter you can rent it for \$400.

Mr. Zingaro: We hope the marketing company for the hotel did a good job before the dig a foundation.

Mr. Owens: Baltimore decided they needed a hotel downtown, and nobody would build a hotel in downtown Baltimore because of the crime. So Baltimore put it on the citizens of Baltimore county. They taxed them so they could build their hotel. Nobody stays there because of the crime rate. So, the only way you can build a hotel in Conneaut is on the back of the taxpayers.

Mr. Zingaro: Can I ask what your opinions are about a registration fee for each bed and breakfast?

Mr. Owens: It doesn't bother me. I paid a \$50 fee the first year for the inspection and all that. It won't break us. It's probably a good idea, I can't believe I'm saying this....

Mr. Huskey: They're already taking the bed tax.

Mr. Owens: True, that's a good point. I guess it would tell you where the bed and breakfasts are, and if you don't get any tax receipts, then what's the deal?

Mr. Sedmak: Are we talking a yearly fee?

Mr. Zingaro: I'm not sure, I think at one time we mentioned an annual fee, again, just so we know that something is there.

Mr. Sedmak: Myself, I gotta be totally against that. I brought that up last meeting. When you own a business, you start up with your fees, done!

Ms. Shubitowski: And Jim was in our office today, and he was promoting the idea of approaching this as a business.

Mr. Sedmak: It is a business, because you're going to pay taxes, fees, insurances, you're going to pay, it's as simple as that, in some way or form. So, if you start up a bed and breakfast, you pay your one fee, you're done.

Mr. Owens: I'm never a proponent of more taxes and fees. I had to pay a \$50 fee for the inspection and occupation permit. That was it.

Mr. Huskey: For me, it's not only these fees, but Expedia charges 15%, and then you have the bed tax. We just found out that we should be doing state sales tax. I can show you from the Ohio Revised Code that says we should be doing it if you serve breakfast.

Mrs. Spencer: Do you serve breakfast, is that standard or just if they request it?

Mr. Huskey: It's standard. We've always had it complimentary. But for the state tax, we have to do it on the price of the breakfast, or if we don't have it out stating the breakfast is so much, then we have to do it on the entire price.

Mrs. Spencer: But you're not selling that breakfast if it's complimentary.

Mr. Huskey: I'm still serving the breakfast. We just found this out when we were going with Expedia, because this tax that they were putting on there was different from what we thought and we went back and checked, and upon investigating, we found we should have been doing the sales tax.

Mr. Zingaro: If you get a room in Atlantic City that's on the ocean and has a lot of casinos, if it's a complimentary room, you still have to pay the taxes.

Mr. Huskey: So for one night, let's say it's \$175, almost \$75 of that is going to taxes or commissions or whatever. I had one guest comment on the prices saying it was a little bit higher than what they thought.

Mrs. Gaugh: So your typical guest is like say Stanley or somebody just visiting Stanley or business?

Mr. Huskey: It's been a hodge podge of everything. I've had some just visiting the area, had some recently picking up kids at Camp Fitch, business people traveling through.

Mrs. Gaugh: Your business is... fishing? (directed towards Mr. Owens)

Mr. Owens: Yeah, people going fishing, family reunions, just visiting friends. Got a couple that comes every year from Stubenville that just likes the lake.

Mr. Huskey: They always want to eat somewhere, so we're always promoting our restaurants, which is a good working thing for our community. Instead of sending them out to Ashtabula, I'm sending them down to Sparky's or Breakwall BBQ, or White Turkey or something.

Mr. Zingaro: We talked about the owner being on the premises or being owner occupied. What are your feelings about that? Some of us have thought that maybe the owner should be.

Mr. Owens: Doesn't apply to me, because, vacation rentals, by definition, is not there. I find it curious that the owner is required to be there, because my understanding is that in a funeral home, someone has to live in the funeral home. Maybe that's just in W. Virginia where I used to live, but if you have somebody living there, I don't know why it would necessarily have to be the owner.

Mr. Zingaro: I think we wanted to make sure that someone was available.

Ms. Notte: My personal opinion was that it wasn't important that someone be on site, but rather having someone in a reasonable closeness that could care for issues. When we looked at the language in other communities, a lot of them included that the owner needs to be on site. I felt that was a bit prohibitive.

Mr. Zingaro: Are your guests permitted to cook?

Mr. Owens: Oh yeah, I mean, it's a house. We have a gas grill, the Amish love the washer and dryer. I've had Amish come for other reasons. For instance, there's a family that has a camp out at Evergreen.

Mr. Huskey: My wife is very particular. She keeps a very clean kitchen, and doesn't want other people cooking in there.

Mr. Zingaro: Another issue, employees. Do you have employees other than yourselves?

Mr. Owens: No, I have contractors for mowing the grass and cleaning.

Mr. Zingaro: So nobody else actually lives there?

Mr. Owens: No

Mr. Zingaro: Do you have a lockbox for keys?

Mr. Owens: I've got two electronic boxes, one on the side and one on the front door, and I program it differently for everyone. I have thought about the bedrooms, I could do that.

Mr. Zingaro: What about signage?

Mr. Owens: I have a little sign that's about this wide (???) and this high (???), says Gull Haven on it.

Mr. Zingaro: People pretty much know where you're located when they're coming?

Mr. Owens: Yeah, the only reason we have the sign is if they're not sure which house it is. On Buffalo street, it's not like people routinely drive down the street and say, oh, there's a bed and

breakfast. Oh, back to what you were saying about BRBO, Expedia. When we started out with vacation rentals.com, it was really great. I think we paid them \$200 per year, we got a web site, we got referrals and everything else, it was great. Then they got acquired by Expedia. Now their annual rate is \$500 per year, and they also charge what we call an extortion fee. They call it a service fee, To me it's extortion. They're charging people, in my case it's 12%, in his case it's 15%. They do *nothing* for it.

Mr. Huskey: All we get is exposure.

Mr. Owens: But you're paying for that with your annual fee, right? The \$500? But you get nothing for the extortion fee. At any rate, I'm just thinking they're skating on this. We pay taxes on the rentals, I'm sure they're not paying taxes, you know, BRBO, Home Away, and their other Expedia names. But that's on, whether it's a month or a day or whatever, they charge that fee. So, if you're looking for a revenue source, I'd be talking to them.

Ms. Notte: Do you know the major source of your customers? Is that from a site like Expedia, or is that something the local community shares on a pamphlet or referrals?

Mr. Owens: Glad you asked that. Unfortunately, I was thinking I wanted to get away from, ever since Expedia bought that, it's just greedy, it's disgusting, I've wanted to get away from them and this year was going to be the year. But I had a contractor from Maine book through BRBO and I booked them, and once they're booked through that website, that one contractor, his one week stay turned into 6 separate weeks. So, I was looking at that and thought, gee, that kind of paid, even though I hate Expedia.

At this time Paul Sedmak got an emergency phone call and had to leave.

Mr. Owens: So, we have a lot of repeats, we're getting a lot of Amish referrals. We get people who call the Chamber of Commerce, we get referrals from VisitConneautohio.com. We want to be able to take in enough money to pay the taxes, maintain the building, pay the insurance and all that.

Mr. Zingaro: D Day is a busy time for you?

Mr. Owens: The German high command wanted to rent it. We charged \$100 for a couple and \$10 per head beyond that. So the German High Command was in for \$160 a day, it would have been \$800 - \$900 a week, but when they quit doing D Day, I'll find somebody else, that won't be a problem, but I don't charge them any more than I do anyone else.

Mr. Huskey: Our rate are the same during D Day as the rest of the year. I mean, during the winter time we reduce rates to generate some business, but it's not something we do to go out and try to raise rates during that week.

Mr. Zingaro: Generally speaking, you don't see an ordinance for bed and breakfast as being so smothering that you can't operate.

Mr. Owens: In my opening, I said I'm in total compliance with your revisions, and I just had these 3 or 4 issues that didn't even apply to me, but I felt that regulations should be consistent with all other businesses.

Mr. Zingaro: And probably 95% of the bed and breakfasts in town are compliant.

Mrs. Parlongo: It's just if somebody wants to start one, they would have guidelines too of what is necessary.

Mrs. Gaugh: And we don't want to have that one with no insurance. If something happens, your business is gone.

Mr. Owens: When I got started, Dolly Sherman walked me through the process. If it wasn't for Dolly, I wouldn't have known where to go. So, I've done that for other people too, but that's a good point. It would be nice to have a guideline that says what you need to do. You need to pay your \$50 for your occupation permit, you need to pay your taxes to the city, taxes to the county, stuff like that.

Mr. Zingaro: And whether you pay your property tax is neither here nor there for us for running a bed and breakfast. That's between you and the tax collector. And if you wanted to sell your property as a business, you can say, look, it goes along with what the city has, it's within the ordinance, as opposed to someone coming in under the radar. My first comment on this was, are we going to have this in place with no one to enforce? We have a lot of things on the books, but we don't have many people enforcing what's on the books.

Ms. Notte: One other thing to mention. In my exchange with Stephanie from the county visitors bureau, she indicated that the research they did indicated that the people would like to come more and stay, but they're looking for more luxurious options. So, this is another reason why we're trying to diversify what's available. Your point earlier regarding hotels, some of those people that might not be staying, they're looking for accommodations that may be different from what we offer today.

Mr. Owens: I don't feel the Lakefront Hotel will impact our business at all. You're not going to get an Amish family pay \$800 a day for 4 rooms when they can pay \$800 for a week. By the same token, I, as a taxpayer, don't want to see my taxes go up to build something that's going to sit empty overlooking the lake 8 months out of the year.

Mr. Zingaro: As a taxpayer too, we all contributed to the Geneva Lodge.

Mrs. Gaugh: Which has turned out to be a gem.

58:13

Mr. Zingaro – We need a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Sedmak – made the motion to adjourn the meeting
Ms. Notte – seconded the motion.
Roll was called – All approved
Time Meeting Adjourned: 7:09

Joe Zingaro - Chair

Melanie Shubitowski- Clerk