

FREEDOM TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
Public Hearing Zoning Happy Hearts Feline Rescue
Conditional Use Permit

October 3, 2017

These minutes are not approved until our next meeting.

Chairman Lindemann called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Members Present: Karen Flahie, Matt Little, Larry Lindemann, Susan Ochs and Dan Schaible. Township Supervisor, Dale Weidmayer and Planner Rodney Nanney were in attendance also.

There was a motion by Little to open the Public Hearing, supported by Flahie, motion passed.

Chairman Lindemann asked planner, Rodney Nanney, to give a brief overview of the reason for the conditional use application. It started with enforcement of the zoning ordinance as Happy Hearts Feline Rescue was operating in the residential Lake District, which is an illegal use according to the ordinance.

Many emails were received by the Commission supporting the Rescue

Public comments:

Jean Spencer thanked Dale Weidmayer, Rodney Nanney and Larry Lindemann for their help and thanked everyone who was attending tonight's meeting for their support and also thanked the people who wrote 60 plus letters supporting the Rescue. She stated that they are a 501c3 and have a state license for up to 40 cats.

Linda Dalton asked why there was an issue, what is the difference between 40 cats or 40 chickens? Larry answered that cats are domesticated and chickens are under the state Dept. of Ag. The issue is that it's in a residential lake zoning.

Sandy Fletcher said she manages the Pleasant Lake Mobile home park and the Rescue takes in a lot of strays that people leave behind. She also stated that the township shouldn't pick on the rescue when for the last 2 or 3 years has done nothing to clean up the eye sore of the bar next door.

Cathy Moore supported her next door neighbor that there is no noise, smells, pollution or disturbances coming from the Rescue.

Frank Lobbstaef, another close neighbor supported the rescue said he didn't know the cats were even there.

Jan Marble Stagg from Dexter asked how the Rescue could get a variance. Rodney explained that a variance can't be given and explained the reason and steps that needed to be done to become legal

Malinda McCain of Chelsea said that she sent some kittens to the Rescue and asked the purpose of the hearing, was anyone objecting. She was told that this hearing was part of the process and that this was the public's opportunity to object if they wanted to.

Jean Spencer asked about the proposed conditions in Rodney's report, the restriction on their own cats that are outside and volunteer help. Rodney stated the ordinance enforcement officer couldn't be expected to distinguish between personal and rescue cats. Also a home occupation has just family workers not employees.

Catherine Roberts gave her support to the Rescue and has sent cats to it, stated they probably came from some of our farms.

Carol Westfall gave her support to the Rescue and advised that the conditional use permit be given without conditions, she also asked for a show of hands of who was there to support the Rescue.

Pat Redies gave her support and asked for no conditions.

Melanie Nau asked why the Rescue needed any permit. Rodney stated that kennels are not allowed in the Lake District. She also asked what the Rescue needed to do to secure a permit. Rodney explained what was required by the ordinance for approval.

Teri Campbell, the owner of Bridgewater kennel, supports the Rescue especially that the cats are housed indoors. She said to pass the permit and amend the ordinance to allow volunteers.

Kevin Nau asked what the ordinance was and why there can be no volunteers.

Melanie Nau said that she wants kids and other volunteers to be able to work there.

Lauron Nitchie said she volunteers there and loves it. She said it helps teens to learn to socialize and also fight depression.

Denise Wertz said to approve the permit and change the ordinance to allow volunteers.

Philip Johnson appreciates the township's help but has concerns with some of the limitations being talked about.

Ron Nitchie said he counted 45 people at the meeting, they are all for it. He also said that the Rescue provides a service to the community and that local volunteers are good. He asked to possibly amend the ordinance to allow volunteers.

Melanie Nau said she has a special needs child who volunteers at the Rescue. As a parent it is very important to her trying to keep her child involved.

Janis Webster said she is from Chelsea and lives in a condo. She has brought cats to the Rescue. She asked how to change the ordinance to allow for volunteers. She was told that it is ultimately up to the township board.

Catherine Roberts asked if a variance can be given. Rodney explained that the township can't give a use variance.

Janice Webster asked if being a 501c3 nonprofit meant anything as far as being not being called a business.

Kevin Nau asked how a conditional use permit worked. Rodney explained the process and if everything is met per the ordinance the planning commission must approve.

Philip Johnson asked if a conditional use permit could be reversed if the Rescue was done with it. Rodney explained that yes it can by the same process that it was given but the planning commission can't ask for that.

Jean Spencer asked if the conditional use permit can be tied to the state license or the rescue or the nonprofit. Rodney said it goes with the parcel of land.

There being no further public comment, Chairman Lindemann closed the public hearing at 8:35

Respectfully,

Dan Schaible Secretary