

PLANNING COMMISSION

October 20, 2025

Public Hearing

CALL TO ORDER: 7:00 p.m.

ATTENDANCE:

Commission: Mayor Jones, Councilmember Koscho, Scott Dolan, Anthony Savage, Jeri Leigh Siss Laurie Beran, Secretary; David Valentine, Zoning Inspector; Rita McMahon Aislinn Consulting
SAFD Assistant Chief Ron Zaleha, SAPD Lieutenant the Michael Harvan

Cornerstone Pregnancy Services: Cynthia Carter-Harris, Connie Bohan, Lois Koehler

Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Father Timothy O'Connor, Nancy Ann Smith, Marilyn & Joe Siekeres

Residents: Jeanne Maschari 306 & Mike Sangiacomo 111 E Main St.; Linda & Bill Quarando 574 & Ronald Busser 584 S Lake St.

OPENING REMARKS (Mayor)

The purpose of the public hearing is to consider a conditional use permit application for the establishment of a maternity home within a residential and agricultural district, located at 333 S Lake St. the vacant NBVM Rectory. This proposal touches on both land use considerations and the broader values of our community—compassion, support, and responsible development.

As always, our goal is to ensure that any decision made reflects a careful balance between the needs of the applicant, the rights of neighboring property owners, and the long-term vision for our community. We welcome public input and encourage respectful, constructive dialogue throughout this hearing.

The Planning Commission secretary presented the Village's Codified Ordinances that relate to Maternity Homes.

1129.02 Definitions

49.1 MATERNITY HOME: a residential care facility operated by a not-for-profit organization that provides care and support services for single pregnant women, including up to two of their children, during pregnancy and for a period not to exceed twenty-four months post-partum. Support services shall be for residents only and shall not include on-site medical care.

1133.05 A-R AGRICULTURAL-RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT

(c) (14) Maternity Home

Ordinance 1165.09 CONDITIONS FOR SPECIFIC USES

No uses substantive:

(y) Maternity Home

- (1) The facility shall be limited to not more than 6 women and their children at any one time.
- (2) The facility shall provide 24-hour on-site staffing.
- (3) The facility shall submit a security plan to the Village approved by the Chief of Police and Council.
- (4) The facility shall provide training, educational and support services to the women.
- (5) The facility shall complete an annual fire inspection.

(6) The facility's Conditional Use Permit must be reviewed every two years.

PRESENTATION

Cornerstone Pregnancy Services CEO Cynthia Carter-Harris presented the proposed project. Refer to Exhibit A – PC10202025

Questions from the Commission and Public (Responses were made by Ms. Carter-Harris.)
(CPS – Cornerstone Pregnancy Services)

Resident Screening and Program Details

Question: "Can you share with us the vetting process for your residents?"

The vetting process for residents typically begins with referrals from organizations such as CPS, Lorain County Health Department, and other partnering social agencies. Clients may also self-refer by completing an online application. Once the application is received, the organization conducts an interview and screening assessments, including a depression screening and a series of questions to understand the client's history. The process relies on the honesty of applicants regarding experiences such as domestic violence or substance abuse. Additionally, three recommendations are required for program admission. When a social worker refers a mother to the program, they provide a case file to ensure the organization is fully informed about the client's situation. Referrals may originate from various sources, including agencies, the Johnson family, or directly from homeless shelters when a pregnant woman is in crisis and the shelter recognizes the organization's capacity to assist.

Question: "Will women currently experiencing domestic violence be allowed to stay?"

No, the facility will not house individuals actively involved in domestic violence situations. However, women with a history of domestic abuse who are no longer in crisis may be considered after thorough screening.

Question: "When somebody becomes a resident there, are they required to stay there every night while they reside there?"

Residents are required to adhere to the structured nature of the program, which includes staying at the facility nightly. Upon entry, residents must agree to the program guidelines. If a client chooses not to follow the program structure or guidelines, they will be discharged from the facility.

Question: "In the event that a resident is found to be using drugs while in the program, is there a protocol in place for their removal from the facility?"

The facility does not plan to house individuals with active substance abuse issues. Upon entry, residents are screened for drug use. If a resident is found to be using drugs during their stay, they will be discharged from the program. This policy is in place to maintain a safe environment and reduce the likelihood of medical emergencies such as overdoses.

Question: "Will the women who are there be working or are they going to be with you 24/7?"

Residents will follow a structured program. While some may participate in internships or educational opportunities, such as attending Lorain County Community College or vocational training, their schedules will be integrated into the program plan. Time off-site for these activities will be accounted for within their individualized plans.

Question: "Will these women have vehicles or are you providing transportation for them?"

Most residents will not have personal vehicles. Transportation needs will be met through local transit services. Many residents qualify for Medicaid, which provides up to 15 rides (annually) through the

county's transit system. In the future, the organization plans to acquire a residential vehicle to assist with transportation.

Question: "Communal bathrooms—will anyone oversee them to ensure they're kept clean, or is that the residents' responsibility?"

Yes, residents are responsible for maintaining cleanliness in shared spaces, including communal bathrooms. As part of the program's life skills training, mothers are assigned weekly household tasks such as cleaning the kitchen or bathrooms. These responsibilities are tracked to ensure follow-through, helping residents build habits necessary for independent living. The program emphasizes transformational life skills, encouraging daily routines that mirror what will be expected once residents transition to independent housing.

Question: "Are you limiting residents to having one child, and if that child is school-aged, will they be attending school locally?"

Residents may have one child and/or be pregnant. If the child is of school age, they will attend school within the local school system.

Question: "Is there an age limit for children who may reside with their mothers?" Specifically, it was asked whether teenagers would be eligible. The response indicated that, at present, only children aged five and under are permitted to stay with their mothers in the community housing.

Question: "Are there instances where a woman who previously graduated from the program could return if her situation changes?"

The program is designed to promote long-term sustainability. While the goal is to help residents achieve stability, individualized case management will guide each participant. Alumni may return to support current residents, sharing their success stories and offering encouragement.

Question: "Do you have follow-up after residents leave the program?"

Yes, some former residents remain involved as alumni, returning to mentor and encourage current participants. This ongoing connection supports the program's mission of transformation and stability.

Question: "You mentioned a year-long stay. Is it possible for residents to stay longer?"

Yes, while the standard stay is one year, the maximum allowed duration is 18 months.

Question: "Is the home only for Lorain County residents?"

The response to this question was not explicitly stated in the discussion, but the program appears to be primarily focused on serving the local community.

Security & Safety Concerns

Question: "When you're allowing visitors to access the facility, you have people that are at risk. You really don't know too much about the background of your visitors coming in. Is there a searchable program that you use? Do you search the individuals coming unto the property?"

Visitors are not physically searched upon entry, but signage clearly states that firearms are prohibited on the premises. If a resident wishes to have a visitor—such as the father of her child—she must submit a request at least one week in advance. This allows time for a background check, which includes searches of county and state records, contingent on the visitor's authorization.

Question: "And again, with the visitors, what does that background check look like?"

The background check involves searching county and state records, provided the visitor gives authorization for a criminal background check.

Question: “And when the visit takes place in the facility, do you isolate those parties from the rest of the residence or is it done in like a general area where everybody has access to everybody else?”

Visits occur in a monitored public space where staff can observe interactions. The space is open but designated so that only the resident and her visitor are present during the visit. Other residents do not share the space during these visits.

Additional Note:

The organization retains the right to restrict visitor access based on the outcome of the vetting process. Residents must submit visitor requests at least a week in advance to allow sufficient time for background checks.

Question: “Will your staff go through some sort of fire extinguisher training?”

Yes, staff will receive fire extinguisher training as part of their safety preparedness. The facility will also undergo annual fire inspections to ensure compliance with safety standards.

Question: “Will the fire and police departments receive copies of your safety procedures?”

Yes, initial copies have been provided, but revisions are expected as the building’s safety systems are finalized. Updates will include changes to the sprinkler system and other infrastructure, and revised plans will be shared with emergency services.

Question: “Will there be security cameras in public areas and outside the facility? How will residents and staff enter—will it be key entry?”

Security measures will include surveillance cameras in public and exterior areas of the property. Entry to the facility will be controlled through a key-access system to ensure safety for residents and staff.

Question: “If a resident goes into labor during the night, will the shift worker call 911 or transport the resident to the hospital?”

Each resident will have a birth plan in place, outlining transportation arrangements and support contacts. Most women will designate a support person—such as a parent or friend—who can assist during labor, including transportation to the hospital. The shift worker will not leave the facility unattended; emergency plans ensure coverage and continuity of care.

Question: “Will the facility ever be left unstaffed, especially during emergencies?”

No, the facility will not be left unstaffed. In the event of an emergency, staff will contact the director or other designated personnel to ensure coverage. Maintaining staff presence at all times is a priority.

Question: “Is there a safety plan in place for emergencies, especially during overnight hours when only one staff member may be present?”

Yes, the facility will conduct regular fire drills in coordination with the fire department. These drills will include designated evacuation areas and headcounts to ensure all residents are accounted for. Special considerations will be made for infants and children. The organization has implemented successful safety plans at its Elyria campus and intends to replicate those practices at the new maternity home.

Question: “How quickly can follow-up staff arrive in an emergency?”

Staff response time varies, but efforts are made to ensure prompt arrival. The organization maintains a strong relationship with the local fire department and is committed to developing and practicing emergency protocols, including weather-related drills and staffing coordination.

Question: “Would it be feasible for your team of six staff members and volunteers to implement an on-call program, so someone is always available to respond quickly during nighttime emergencies?”

Yes, implementing an on-call rotation is feasible and supported by the organization. Staff members will be assigned on-call responsibilities to ensure that emergencies are addressed promptly without relying on multiple calls or delayed responses.

Question: “Will there be specific days for visitation, or will it occur daily during set hours?”

Visitation will follow a structured schedule, with designated hours each day. Specific guidelines will be provided to ensure consistency and safety.

Question: “What are the designated visiting hours?”

Visiting hours will generally end between 6:00 and 7:00 p.m. Each day includes a designated “downtime” period when residents begin to wind down and prepare for the night.

Staffing

Question: “Are your staff members trained to some level of medical care, being that these women have young children or may be pregnant? What is your protocol?”

Staff members are not medical professionals but do receive basic emergency training, including First Aid and CPR. The CPS facility is located within a medical center in Elyria, which provides access to medical services. Staff are trained to assess emergency situations, initiate CPR if necessary, and contact emergency services. Protocols are in place for handling medical emergencies, and coordination with the local fire department is planned to ensure responders are familiar with the facility and staff capabilities.

Question: “Will those protocols perhaps be discussed with the fire department since we do provide medical response?”

Yes, the organization intends to coordinate with the fire department to ensure mutual understanding of emergency procedures and staff roles during medical incidents.

Question: “What is the ratio of caseworkers to clients?”

The initial plan is to have one caseworker for every six residents.

Question: “How many total staff members do you anticipate having at the facility?”

The organization anticipates having approximately six staff members. This will include a director, a program director, a case manager, and three shift leaders who will help manage the day-to-day operations of the home.

Question: “Will the case manager also serve as the caseworker for the residents?”

Yes, the case manager will function as the caseworker, assisting residents in connecting with services and resources as part of their individualized care plans.

Question: “Will there be additional staff to help with the needs of the children?”

In addition to the core staff, the organization will have a trained volunteer corps to support the needs of both the mothers and their children. These volunteers will assist with various tasks and provide supplemental support as needed.

Question: “Guests must be approved in advance—should requests be submitted 24 hours ahead, or is it seven days as previously mentioned?”

Guest visits must be approved in advance, with requests ideally submitted at least seven days prior to allow time for proper vetting. While 24-hour notice may be considered in some cases, the standard policy is to require a full week’s notice to ensure safety and compliance with background checks.

Question: “Given the concern about prohibited guests—such as those involved in trafficking or under the influence of drugs or alcohol—is staff trained to identify these risks?”

Yes, staff members are thoroughly trained to recognize signs of human trafficking, domestic abuse, and substance influence. Cornerstone follows best practices in screening and intervention, and staff are equipped to identify and respond to potential risks. However, guests are not subjected to breathalyzer tests; instead, staff rely on behavioral indicators and established protocols.

Question: “You mentioned six staff members—does that include six caseworkers?”

No, there will be one caseworker for every six residents. The total staff includes a director, a program director, a case manager, and three shift leaders. The director oversees the home’s operations, while the program director implements the program structure. Shift leaders manage daily activities and ensure proper functioning of the facility.

Question: “How many staff members are on duty during overnight hours, such as midnight?”

Typically, one shift leader will be on duty during overnight hours. While interns may be considered in the future, current staffing plans include one staff member present during nighttime hours, responsible for overseeing residents and their children.

Question: “What is the average number of staff on-site during business hours (e.g., 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.)?”

During peak daytime hours, there will typically be three to four staff members on-site, including the director, receptionist, and either the program director or case manager, depending on scheduling.

Question: “It sounds like you’ve already selected a director for the home—is that correct?”

No, a director has not yet been officially selected. Jackie, mentioned earlier, is the operations manager responsible for overseeing all Cornerstone properties. Her role includes ensuring facilities are up to code, managing repairs, and conducting seasonal safety training for staff, such as winter preparedness and slip prevention.

Question: “What qualifications are you seeking in a director?”

The ideal candidate will have experience in housing and case management, along with a bachelor’s degree in nonprofit management or social work. Cornerstone is actively recruiting individuals who meet these qualifications.

Question: “What qualifications will caseworkers have?”

Caseworkers will have experience in case management. Some may be certified community health workers trained through Lorain County Public Health’s multi-week program, or have backgrounds in social services.

Question: “Will you maintain three shifts per day, seven days a week, and will volunteers assist?”

Yes, the facility will operate with three shifts daily. In addition to staff, trained volunteers will assist with specific responsibilities to support residents.

Question: “Will multilingual staff be available?”

Cornerstone will seek to hire multilingual staff when possible. In cases where language support is needed, translation software will be used to ensure effective communication.

Facility and Property

Question: “The plans submitted in September show seven bedrooms, but only six can be used. Has that been revised?”

Yes, revisions have been made in response to commission feedback.

Question: “What about the bedroom on the second floor southwest corner that does not have a closet?”
A closet has been added to that room.

Question: “The commission was concerned about shared bathrooms. Initially, it was supposed to be one bathroom per suite. Has that changed?”

The facility will include communal bathrooms shared between two bedrooms. This setup is common in maternity homes and is used as a life skills teaching opportunity, helping mothers learn to maintain a clean and organized home environment.

Question: “It has been mentioned that this is the first facility of its kind in Lorain County. In Cuyahoga or surrounding counties, what is the average age of the mothers and their children who enter similar programs?”

The average age range of mothers in similar programs is typically between 18 and 35 years old. However, there are exceptions—some facilities have served women in their 40s who found themselves in crisis situations, such as losing housing. Many of these women are employed and may be just one paycheck away from homelessness, highlighting the importance of transitional housing programs.

Question: “What were some of the determining factors that led CPS and the Diocese to choose South Amherst as the location for this home?”

CPS announced its intention to establish a maternity home during its annual spring fundraiser. The decision to choose South Amherst was influenced by individuals familiar with both the organization and the community, who recognized the potential for renewal and support. The rectory was identified as a suitable location due to its peaceful setting, which is conducive to reflection and personal growth. The presence of a supportive faith community on-site further reinforced the decision, creating what was described as the “right chemistry” and a strong foundation for transformation.

Question: “Will the parish transfer ownership of the building to the county?”

No, the building will remain owned by the Diocese. Cornerstone, a private nonprofit organization unaffiliated with the county, will lease and maintain the property under a formal agreement with the church.

Question: “Will Cornerstone be responsible for renovations and upkeep?”

Yes, Cornerstone will handle all renovations and ongoing maintenance of the property, both inside and outside.

Question: “Will each woman be allowed to have two children, and will there be a playground?”

Resident capacity is limited to a total of 18 individuals, including mothers and children. Most children will be under five years old. Plans include building a playground to accommodate young children, recognizing that outdoor play may increase noise levels in the neighborhood.

Property Ownership and Lease Arrangement

Clarification was sought on the ownership of the property. It was confirmed that the property is still owned by the church, specifically by the Cleveland Diocese. The proposed arrangement would involve a lease agreement between CPS and the Diocese. home.

The duration of the lease was discussed. While the exact term is yet to be finalized, the proposed lease is expected to last approximately two years. Residents may be allowed to stay for up to 18 months under this arrangement.

Decision-Making Authority

Question: "Who holds the authority to make the final decision or has it already been made?" It was clarified that the decision would be subject to a vote by the Planning Commission at a separate meeting. The public hearing was in order for Cornerstone to share their presentation with the community and for the community to share any concerns.

CLOSING COMMENTS

The mayor thanked those in attendance for their participation. The commission called a meeting for November 3rd at 7p.m. to consider the approval or denial of the Conditional Use Permit in accordance with:

Codified Ordinance 1165.03 (d) In approving a Conditional Use Permit, the Planning Commission, with due regard to the nature and state of all adjacent structures and uses in the district within which same is located, shall make written findings that the following are fulfilled:

- (1) The use requested is listed among the conditional uses in the district for which application is made; or is similar in character to those listed in that district;
 - (2) The requested use will not impair the integrity or character of the surrounding or adjoining districts, nor adversely affect the safety, health, or welfare of the community or of the immediate neighbors of the property;
 - (3) The requested use is essential or desirable to the public convenience or welfare;
 - (4) The requested use will be in conformity with a land use plan and vision for the Village;
 - (5) Adequate utilities, access roads, drainage, sanitation or other necessary facilities have been or are being provided;
 - (6) That adequate measures have been or will be taken to provide ingress and egress so designed as to minimize the traffic congestion in the public streets; and
 - (7) That the conditional use shall, in all other respects, conform to the applicable regulations of the district in which it is located and preserve the purpose and intent of this Zoning Ordinance.
- If the Planning Commission approves a Conditional Use, there is a 15-day waiting period before a permit can be issued. During this time, appeals may be filed with the Fiscal Officer, who will schedule the matter for the next Village Council meeting. No permit will be granted until any appeal is resolved.
 - If the Planning Commission denies a Conditional Use application, the applicant also has 15 days to appeal to the Village Council via the Fiscal Officer. If no appeal is filed, the decision is final.
 - The Planning Commission has the authority to modify or waive standards if it finds the project aligns with the Chapter's intent, the Village's Vision, and does not harm public health, safety, or welfare.

ADJOURNMENT

Time: 8:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie J. Beran
Planning Commission Secretary