

VILLAGE OF HOMEWOOD



MEETING MINUTES

DATE OF MEETING:

August 10, 2023

PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

7:00 pm

Village Hall Board Room
2020 Chestnut Street
Homewood, IL 60430

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Sierzega called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

ROLL CALL:

In attendance were Members Bransky, Cap, Castaneda, Johnson, O'Brien, and Chairman Sierzega. Member Alfonso was absent. Present from the Village were Staff Liaison Angela Mesaros and Building Department Secretary Darlene Leonard. There were ten people in the audience. The public was able to watch and listen to the meeting via Zoom webinar.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

Chair Sierzega asked if there were any changes or corrections to the minutes of June 8, 2023. There were no changes.

Member O'Brien moved to approve the minutes; seconded by Member Cap.

AYES: Members Bransky, Cap, Castaneda, O'Brien, Johnson, Chairman Sierzega

NAYS: None

ABSTENTIONS: None

ABSENT: Member Alfonso

REGULAR BUSINESS:

CASE 23-22: Special Use Permit for a Crematorium

Chairman Sierzega read the description of the case and swore in the applicant, Jeffrey Sachs. Mr. Sachs presented his case.

Ms. Mesaros stated that she had received two objections for this use. One of them was from a business owner located in the same building.

Chairman Sierzega asked if the applicant had operated another crematorium. Mr. Sachs stated no and added that he currently has a service to pick up and deliver bodies to funeral homes and crematoriums.

Member Cap asked if the applicant was familiar with the quality standards set by the Illinois Pollution Control Board, what the standards are that must be met, and the name of the company that will be installing the cremation systems. Mr. Sachs stated he was unaware of the standards and stated the Company is BNL Cremation Systems out of Florida.

Member Cap also asked how the systems work, what the maintenance is for them, and if there was any sort of odor. Mr. Sachs stated everything is collected inside the stacks, maintenance is done roughly every 6 months unless there is an issue, and as long as the system is maintained and working properly there is no odor.

Member O'Brien asked the applicant what impact this business would have on his current clients, including the existing crematorium in Homewood, and if he would still be a customer of his current clients. Mr. Sachs stated he has spoken to the owner of the existing crematorium and does not believe this business would directly compete with it; further stating his business would not advertise to the public and would deal directly with local funeral homes. Mr. Sachs added that he wants to be more of a partner than a competitor.

Member Johnson asked the applicant what percentage of the work would be from funeral homes, how busy the location would be with the number of cremations, and asked about deliveries. Mr. Sachs stated he was unsure of the exact number, but estimates 75% and anticipates approximately 500 cremations. Deliveries would be from smaller vehicles like minivans in the rear to the bay.

Member Castaneda asked the applicant why he chose this location. Mr. Sachs stated it was an opportunity that arose.

Member Castaneda asked Staff if there were any details to the received objections. Staff Liaison Mesaros stated there were no details.

Member Castaneda stated she looked up crematoriums and the main concern was environmental - the mercury emissions from the dental fillings and added that the numbers were quite varied with one study stating 7% of all industrial emissions while another said 1%.

Chairman Sierzega asked the applicant what the planned hours would be, asked about potential staff, and if there would be services on site. Mr. Sachs stated the office hours would be limited and the cremation process would vary from 1-2 per day or 5-6 per day; it would depend on the numbers coming in; and the hours could change based on demand. Mr. Sachs stated there would be one person other than himself and he would add staff as the business grows. Chairman Sierzega asked if there would be memorial services on site. Mr. Sachs stated no.

Chairman Sierzega asked about the number of remains that would be stored on-site if urns would be sold, and if the business would be open to the public for the sale, and asked what the ashes would be in. Mr. Sachs stated how many bodies would be stored would depend on the storage unit he gets. If he goes with the 10' x 20' it would be about 12. If he goes with the 10' x 30' it would be 14-16 bodies. Any urns would be sold only if he started selling directly to the public. The ashes go into a temporary container.

Member Bransky asked the applicant who would be operating the equipment and what kind of training was involved. Member Bransky stated that it has to be recognized by the State Comptroller's office. Mr. Sachs stated the employee would operate the equipment. And added that most equipment is automated with removed access, but either he or the employee would be on site. There is an 8-hour training session that is offered by the State Association, the Cremation Society, and the equipment manufacturer offer it, and stated the State requires the individual operating the equipment to be certified.

Member Castaneda asked how all the guidelines and mandates could be learned in 8 hours. Mr. Sachs stated the knowledge of the State laws and statutes is up to the business owner and he would make sure his employees learned them. Mr. Sachs did not know the guidelines and was not able to answer.

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Member Johnson stated there are no local requirements, just State mandates for environmental requirements. Member Johnson asked Staff if the Inspector would look at it. Staff Liaison Mesaros stated not the Village, it would be the State Inspector.

Chairman Sierzega asked the applicant if someone from the State would come by periodically. Mr. Sachs stated yes, from the State Comptroller's office; they come out before opening and periodically after opening but he is not sure of the frequency.

Member Bransky asked if there would be an audit of practices and records and how often it occurs. Mr. Sachs stated it does occur, but he has never been present when the State is in the facility so he does not know how often it occurs.

Chairman Sierzega asked if anyone in the audience had any questions.

David McDermott of 2001 Ridge Road was sworn in. Mr. McDermott asked the applicant several questions including how long the corporation has existed, about the previous corporation that was involuntarily dissolved by the State, the location in Homewood versus the one that was proposed in South Holland, how far into development the South Holland location had been, if the applicant was licensed to operate the machinery, if the applicant was a member of the Cremation Society of America, if licenses were obtained in previous years, previous employment at a local funeral home and if he had left under bad terms, if there were any individuals in mind to be employees, how the experience was obtained to get certification without experience, the status of the litigation of the property in South Holland, and how many remains could be cremated in a day. Mr. Sachs stated the business was recently incorporated, and that the previous corporation was involuntarily dissolved in 2021, the location in Homewood is larger than the facility he had planned to open in South Holland. The facility in South Holland was ready to break ground, he had never had a license to operate the machinery. Indiana does not require a certification. Mr. Sachs stated that membership in the cremation society is on hold until after he gets the approval from the Village, he has not obtained licenses in the past, he has 4 people in mind, and he has experience working under others. He did not leave the funeral home on bad terms. He did not finish the probation period.

Mr. McDermott asked the applicant about the status of the litigation of the property in South Holland and the names of the companies involved. Mr. Sachs stated it is in mediation and the properties are Lex Management and Golf Construction.

Member Johnson asked the applicant the time period it takes to cremate a body. Mr. Sachs stated it depends on the machine and the size of the remains.

Vicki Grantham, of the Cremation Society of America, 17859 Bretz Drive, and secretary of the Condo Association, was sworn in. Ms. Grantham asked if the machines with the remote access were the ones that were being obtained. Mr. Sachs stated BNL does not have that technology in their machines so he is unsure what he will get.

Ms. Grantham asked if there was an agreement in place; if the applicant was aware of the cool-down period the machine needs; if the applicant had already signed a lease; if the applicant was aware the Association has to be informed the location will be leased; if he was going to buy the location; if the lease has a clause to fix the roof if the business closes and the equipment is removed; and if the public would be allowed in to witness the cremations. Mr. Sachs stated he does not have a signed contract, the newer and more advanced machines have less of a cool-down period, he has already signed a lease, but was unaware the Condo Association was to be informed, was unaware of the requirements, and was unaware that he could have gotten the information from the Association directly. He has been

requesting this from the broker and the property owner. He is not sure if he will buy the location and there is a clause in the lease allowing him to purchase. It is not in the lease to repair the roof and there are other things that were left out of the lease that were not addressed. Mr. Sachs stated there are no plans at this time to allow the public to witness cremations.

Member Johnson asked the applicant if the lease was approved by the Condo Association. Mr. Sachs stated no it wasn't and that is a question for the broker and the building owner.

Member Bransky asked if they could add their concerns to the Findings of Fact because the business plan is thin and it's a concern.

Chairman Sierzega stated they can be added to the Findings of Fact.

Member Castaneda asked what is required by the State to operate in Illinois. Mr. Sachs stated the certifications can be done before the machines are installed, which takes 4-6 months and is dependent on the Special Use. Mr. Sachs stated that he did not know the answers to that off-hand.

Member Johnson moved to recommend approval of Case 23-22 to grant a special use for a crematorium, Manna Crematory, at 17803 Bretz Drive, subject to the requirements of Section 44-04-10 b of the Village of Homewood Zoning Ordinance and subject to all other local, State, and Federal requirements and licenses. Seconded by Member O'Brien.

AYES: Members Cap, Johnson, O'Brien, and Chairman Sierzega

NAYS: Members Bransky and Castaneda

ABSTENTIONS: None

ABSENT: Member Alfonso

CASE 23-23: Special Use Permit and a Zoning Variance for Ground-Mounted Solar Energy Collections System

Chairman Sierzega read the description of the case and swore in the applicant, Tony Jaswal, who presented the application.

Mr. Jaswal stated the proposed solar panels would be on a 2-acre plot of land owned by INX, it would have 1 million kilowatt hours offset per year, they would connect to INX, the modules would face south with a 10° tilt and they are non-rotating. Mr. Jaswal stated the variance request is to increase the height to 5'7" from 5'.

Member Cap asked the applicant about the plates, the proportion of consumption of INX, if the excess power would be stored onsite or put back into the power grid, who would own the equipment, what plants would be used for the ground cover, how the list of plants compares to the State Statute being pollinator-friendly, the cleaning of the panels, what the fencing would be. Mr. Jaswal stated the plates are 950 kW dc, on an annual basis it would be 3-14% of the annual usage. The power has the option to go into the grid, but most of the power would be consumed onsite. Any power that would go into the grid would be a 1:1 credit. The finance partner, DDS, would own the equipment and sell the power to INX. The plan provided a list of plants that have been reviewed by the Village Arborist Bryon Doerr. The plants are pollinator-friendly. The panels would be cleaned twice a year and there would be landscape maintenance. There is no plan to remove any snow from the panels. The proposal is a 5-foot tall vinyl fence.

Staff Liaison Mesaros stated that both the Police and Fire Chiefs expressed concern about the proposed fence since it couldn't be see-through. Mr. Jaswal stated they are not opposed to changing the fence type.

Mr. Jaswal stated Cook County has no plans to tax the solar arrays. Member Cap asked if there were any examples of solar panels inside Cook County. Mr. Jaswal stated there are ground-mounted systems in Tinley Park, Chicago, Chicago Heights, and University Park with some of them larger than the proposed one. Member Cap asked about the tax assessment on solar arrays outside of Cook County. Mr. Jaswal stated there is the potential for the County to add it as a resource for property taxes in DuPage County, but it's not set yet.

Member Bransky asked about the decommission sequence and what would be removed and asked who would install the conduit, how it would be installed, and in what material. Mr. Jaswal stated the concrete foundation and everything below grade would stay. The conduit would be installed below ground by DSD.

Member Bransky also asked if there would be a battery storage system and if the generator would get the overage. Mr. Jaswal stated this system does not have a battery and yes the generator would get the overage. Member Bransky asked if there would be ponding under the panels from the erosion. Mr. Jaswal stated they have not had that issue.

Chairman Sierzega swore in 4 representatives from INX, Mike DeRosa, Tim Roth, Kevin, Cochran, and Ashley Rooney.

Member O'Brien asked who selected the ground-mounted solar system, why they selected ground-mounted instead of roof-mounted when they purchased the vacant lot, why canopy mounting has not been considered, and why the height variance is being requested. Mr. Jaswal stated General Energy selected the system. The roof was evaluated and it was determined that the roof was not structurally sound enough for the roof-mounted system and the land space was available. Mr. Cochran stated the lot was purchased in 2008 at the same time the land was purchased for the development of INX's facility to the east. Mr. Jaswal stated canopy mounting is an option, but there are no incentives for it in Illinois and it is not feasible economically. The standard height to get under the panels for maintenance is 3 feet, having that and adding the tilt makes the height 5-foot 7 inches. Mr. Jaswal stated canopy installation is not available in Illinois yet, but when the costs come down it could be done, and added that the company is interested in exploring it.

Member O'Brien asked why they wanted to install a 5-foot fence instead of the 4-foot stated in the code. Mr. Jaswal stated typically they do 5 feet as anything taller would cast a shadow. Chairman Sierzega stated it would not be a closed fence. Mr. Jaswal stated it would be an open fence.

Member Johnson stated it is something that should be encouraged and stated it should be included in the staff comments so the information is clear.

Member Castaneda asked if the main disconnect can be done remotely and if MWRD is required. Mr. Jaswal stated that the disconnect must be done manually. It is required and they are in the process of obtaining the MWRD permit.

Chairman Sierzega asked if the company has done any system decommissions and how many panels are being installed. Mr. Jaswal stated the decommissioning is typically done by DSD. His company has the option to do them, but they haven't. Mr. Jaswal stated each panel has 5, so there would be about 2,000 panels.

Member Johnson moved to recommend approval of Case 23-23 to grant (1) a Special Use permit for a ground-mounted solar collection system; (2) a variance from Subsection 44-04-14 (s)1 to located in the front yard; and (3) a variance from Subsection 44-04-14(s)2 for a maximum height of 5.7 feet, at INX International Ink Co. at 1000 Maple Avenue, subject to all other requirements of Section 44-04-14(s) of the Village of Homewood Zoning Ordinance and including the comments from staff regarding the site plan review committee fence and electric main disconnect installation; Seconded by Member O'Brien.

AYES: Members Bransky, Castaneda, Johnson, and Chairman Sierzega

NAYS: Members Cap and O'Brien

ABSTENTIONS: None

ABSENT: Member Alfonso

Member O'Brien stated they should revisit the ordinance and make an amendment to the height of the panels. Staff Liaison Mesaros stated it is a good idea and it will be looked into and added to the list of amendments.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

ADJOURN:

Member O'Brien moved to adjourn the meeting; Member Cap seconded. All members voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 9:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Angela Mesaros

Director of Economic and Community Development