

**MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING  
HELD BY THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION  
JUNE 21, 2021  
MEETING HELD VIA ZOOM**

**ROLL CALL:**

Members Present: Eric Prause, Chairman  
Patrick Kennedy, Vice Chairman  
Michael Stebe, Secretary  
Jessica Poland

Alternate Sitting: Julian Stoppelman

Alternate Members: Teresa Ike

Absent: Bonnie Potocki  
Jessica Scorso

Also Present: Gary Anderson, Director of Planning  
Megan Pilla, Senior Planner  
David Laiuppa, Environmental  
Planner/Wetlands Agent  
Nancy Martel, Recording Secretary

The Chairman opened the Public Hearing at 7:00 PM. The Secretary read the legal notice when the call was made.

MIDWEST FOOD BANK NFP, INC. – Request a special exception per Art. II, Sec. 24.02.01(a) for conversion of a portion of the existing building to warehouse use for a food bank at 579 Middle Turnpike West. – Special Exception (2021-043)

Mr. Alan Lamson, Vice President and Planning Director at FLB Architecture and Planning, East Hartford, introduced himself. Mr. Lamson is representing Midwest Food Bank NFP, Inc. The property in question is located at the northeast corner of Middle Turnpike West and Adams Street. The building currently contains The Odyssey Community School in the front; the rear, which used to be Mustangs Unlimited, is the site proposed for the Midwest Food Bank. The building was all Allied Printing, according to Mr. Lamson, until their relocation on Tolland Turnpike.

Mr. Lamson stated that the proposal is to occupy the northern section of the building on the first floor only for the operation of the Midwest Food Bank. The front of the building is used exclusively for the Odyssey School, with guest and teacher parking in the front, which is also the location of the school bus pickup. The rear of the building has historically been shared between Mustangs Unlimited previously and The Odyssey Community School. He noted that there is an

emergency fence for access by emergency vehicles. At two times during the day, the rear parking lot is used for parents to drop off and pick up students. It is controlled by staff and teachers of the school. The rest of the parking is shared by The Odyssey Community School and what will now be Midwest Food Bank.

Mr. Lamson explained that they will be doing nothing to the site. It is perfect for Midwest Food Bank as it is currently laid out, and will save a great deal of extra work. Except for the product that is being warehoused at this location, the building is very similar to the prior use by Mustangs Unlimited. The front portion closest to Adams Street will be used for reception, offices, space for volunteers and a small production area where some food is repackaged.

According to Mr. Lamson, the only change to the exterior of the building is the installation of one more overhead door on the north side of the building to allow vehicles that pick up food to enter the building, stop, be loaded with the food they are picking up from the food bank, and exit the building. Additionally, they will be installing windows for offices and conference rooms along the east side of the building toward Adams Street.

Mr. Lamson reiterated that a warehouse and distribution of food is allowed as a special exception in the General Business zone. It is subject to certain conditions in Art. II, Sec. 24, as well as in Art. IV, Sec. 20 regarding special exceptions in general. One of the issues in Art. II, Sec. 24 states that no principle or accessory use will be detrimental to public welfare by reason of noise, vibration, smoke, dust, fumes or odor. All of the proposed processes are contained within the building and none of them cause the aforementioned situations. The regulations also limit the size of the building to three stories, according to Mr. Lamson, and limits the building to 50 ft. in height. The highest point of the building is the top of the gymnasium of the school, which is less than 35 ft. in height. Mr. Lamson stated that there will be no accessory structures built. The minimum front yard (West Middle Turnpike) is more than 25 ft.

As mentioned earlier by Mr. Lamson, The Odyssey Community School's entrance is at the front; there is a playground and he reiterated the details of parental pickup for the school. When the structure was Mustangs Unlimited, it was used for warehousing, shipping and receiving, offices, displays, wholesale and limited retail sales. The only difference is that there are no retail sales, and the product is food rather than automobile parts.

Ms. Jan Young, Executive Director of the New England Division of Midwest Food Bank, explained that they are a faith-based organization and the 57<sup>th</sup> largest charity in the United States. The branch in Connecticut will be the 10<sup>th</sup> in the nation. She reported that the corporate office is in Bloomington, IL; they also operate in Haiti and East Africa.

Ms. Young explained that they are an independent food bank, not associated with Feeding America Network. She went on to report the details of their procurement and distribution of sources. According to Ms. Young, they have good working relationships with Connecticut Food Bank and Foodshare.

The primary program for Midwest Food Bank is to distribute food to participating nonprofit agencies at no cost. Any 501(c)(3) nonprofit who in turn gives the food to the neediest resident

in the community is eligible. Ms. Young said they will acquire food and organize it in the warehouse for distribution. They have a box truck and tractor trailer to receive donated food from available sources and a few other carriers will be scheduled occasionally. She noted that safety is a top priority and they want to be good neighbors to The Odyssey School; they have worked with the school and will not accept deliveries during student dropoff or pickup.

Ms. Young reported that they are not a food pantry, but a food bank, and will not have individuals picking up food. Their partner agencies will be pre-scheduled to pick up their food at a set time each month. Again, in partnership with Odyssey School, they will work around the morning and afternoon student dropoff and pickup. They will space out the times for agencies to have time to collect the items they want and the volunteers will load the items.

According to Ms. Young, they are a volunteer-centric organization. The location will have only two or three paid employees. Over time, there will be volunteer opportunities for many ages and abilities. It will be a place where people can come and find friends and help make a difference. This volunteer model makes them very efficient; 99 cents of every dollar goes directly toward food distribution. They are privately funded, and thanks to a generous group of core sponsors, they have sufficient funds in the bank to lease space, outfit a warehouse and begin operations, noted Ms. Young. She went on to detail the success of their food distribution.

Mr. Lamson noted that the special exception criteria required by Art. IV, Sec. 20 of the zoning regulations talks about determination that this is a suitable location. As this has been a warehouse operation, the size of the building is not being increased and the very nature is in harmony with orderly development of the area. It is compatible with other existing uses adjacent to it. He added that it furthers the goals and objectives of the Plan of Conservation and Development, specifically the adaptive reuse of vacant and underutilized sites.

Additionally, reported Mr. Lamson, it is located on a major arterial road, Adams Street, which means that none of the traffic will go through residential neighborhoods. It will not impact the use of any adjoining property, and will not alter the essential characteristics of the area. If anything, the number of vehicles will be less than it was at the peak for Mustangs Unlimited. There is adequate parking for both the school and the food bank. The streets are adequate and there is adequate emergency access. He stated that the building is sprinklered and there is access to all four sides of the building. Mr. Lamson went on to detail the wetlands, explaining that there will be no impact from this proposal.

Ms. Poland sought to confirm that it is strictly for 501(c)(3) organizations and not for a food pantry for Manchester residents.

Ms. Young responded that the criteria include that they need to be a 501(c)(3), they need to be serving at least 40 households, and they need to have a letter of recommendation from an additional nonprofit. She stated that they do a site visit and ensure the food is handled properly.

Mr. Prause acknowledged that the only building change will be the windows as well as a new overhead door.

Mr. Lamson reported that there will be fixed windows on the side because the building is climate controlled, and the overhead door will be the same as the doors on the north side.

Mr. Prause was of the opinion that this would be a great use of the location.

Ms. Pilla noted no outstanding comments. The applicant has satisfactorily responded to all Staff questions.

Mr. Laiuppa explained that this is in an aquifer protection area, but none of the proposed activities qualify as activities that would require a permit to operate in an aquifer area.

There were no members of the public to speak on the application.

Mr. Lamson stated that, if the plan is approved, they will be open sometime in early September.

**MOTION:** Mr. Kennedy moved to close the public hearing. Mr. Stoppelman seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

The public hearing was closed at 7:25 P.M.

I certify these minutes were adopted on the following date:

July 7, 2021 \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Eric Prause, Chairman

**NOTICE: A DIGITAL RECORDING OF THIS PUBLIC HEARING CAN BE HEARD IN THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT.**