

Bldg. plan approved

Homes for mentally handicapped planned

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THE LAPORTE HERALD-ARGUS

A county not-for-profit organization received the go-ahead from the LaPorte County Board of Zoning Appeals Tuesday for its plan to build a \$3 million complex of homes and a lodge for developmentally disabled and mentally retarded adults in Galena Township.

Share Foundation With The Handicapped Inc., which operates a group home for eight severely mentally and physically handicapped people in Michigan City, hopes to open its bigger operation by April or May 1994, said Rev. Dennis Blaney, Share president and priest at Sacred Heart Church in Michigan City.

The complex will be built upon an 184-acre site north of the Toll Road, east of CR-300W and south of Hog Lake. That property was purchased by Share Foundation in 1992 for \$260,000, and will be completely paid for by the end of this month, attorney Thomas Pawloski said.

The zoning board will recommend to the LaPorte County Commission that Share's plan receive final approval. The zoning board granted two variances and two special exceptions — everything for which Share asked:

- ▶ Five clusters of three units in a planned residential development. Essentially, 30 slightly handicapped adults will live in pairs of two, with each pair having a staff member also living with them.

- ▶ A 20-room lodge primarily for handicapped retreats to the country.

- ▶ Two entrance roads from CR-300E into the complex.

- ▶ A craft/gift shop, where some residents will work, making mail-order items.

Concerns addressed

Pawloski and Blaney warded off several remonstrators during the meeting.

Evelyn Bannwart, 6881N CR-300E, charged the lodge could be used to serve liquor and place slot machines. Pawloski denied the possibility.

Bannwart also questioned whether the handicapped living at the facility could maintain the

lodge and grounds.

"Who is going to operate this lodge?" she asked. "Are the handicapped people well enough to? Who will maintain this?"

Pawloski said some of the residents might work on the grounds.

"Will the premises be maintained?" he said. "We certainly hope so."

Another question arose about the facility's septic, and possible disturbance of wetlands on the north grounds.

"The plan is for a septic system for each residential unit," Pawloski said. "Each will be subject to the Indiana State Board of Health."

As for upsetting Hog Lake wetlands, Pawloski said there will not be building on the lake, just an occasional resident walking down to the lake with a fishing pole.

Another resident said she didn't want handicapped persons walking onto her livestock farm and getting hurt.

Pawloski said while he can't guarantee that no residents will wander off, the handicapped people will live with a two-to-one resident-to-staff ratio.

Several residents were concerned their taxes would rise.

"We're saving the state approximately \$600,000 to \$700,000 a year," Blaney said. "The tax on the land is about \$4,000. I don't understand how we're stealing your tax money."

Blaney said Share Foundation is financed primarily through private donations.