

**CITY OF TORRINGTON  
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION  
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
December 27, 2023**

Present: Greg Mele, Chair  
Greg Perosino, Vice Chair  
Donovan Riley, Member  
Donna Greco, Member  
Diane Carroll, Alternate  
Tom Telman, Alternate

Also Present: Jeremy Leifert, AICP; City Planner

Not Present: Jim Bobinski, Member  
Starley Arias, Alternate

**1. Call to Order:**

Chair Greg Mele called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. Attendance is by Zoom or in-person at City Hall Auditorium, Room 218, 140 Main Street, Torrington, CT.

Instructions for Zoom are available online at:

[www.torringtonct.org/zoom](http://www.torringtonct.org/zoom)

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**1-646-558-8656**

**Meeting ID: 795-950-7035**

**Passcode: 907148**

**2. Attendance/Announcement:**

Chair Mele announced seated and serving on the Commission this evening are Commissioners Greg Perosino, Donovan Riley, Donna Greco, Alternate Diane Carroll and Greg Mele. Present via zoom as a non-voting Alternate Commissioner is Tom Telman. Also present is Jeremy Leifert, City Planner.

**3. Public Hearing beginning at 7:00 p.m., December 27, 2023 City Hall Auditorium, Room 218, 140 Main Street, Torrington, CT:**

- a. Special Exception 23-08 and Site Plan 1481  
Applicant: Carrie A. Combs, Trinity Episcopal Church  
Location: 220 Prospect Street  
Proposal: Cold weather emergency homeless shelter,  
Section 3.1, Subsection 2.10

Chair Mele opened the public hearing at 7:03 p.m. and stated seated and serving on the Commission this evening are Commissioners Greg Perosino, Donovan Riley, Donna Greco, Alternate Diane Carroll and Greg Mele. Present via zoom as a non-voting Alternate Commissioner is Tom Telman. Also present is Jeremy Leifert, City Planner.

Ms. Greco read the legal notice of public hearing published in the Republican American. Mr. Mele outlined guidelines for meeting procedures this evening.

Rev. Carrie Combs, 153 Sharon Avenue, Torrington appeared as applicant. The green cards for neighborhood notifications are to be submitted by the church office administrator. Rev. Combs verified the public hearing signs were properly posted. Rev. Combs gave a presentation of their proposal for a cold weather shelter. The community kitchen is housed in this same building, and the Gathering Place with resources for the unhoused is located nearby.

Mr. Conrad Sinkowich of Trinity Church, 69 Wadhams Avenue, Torrington appeared with historical overview of church services. Trinity Church was started in 1843, and in 1898 the stone church presently seen today was constructed. In 1909 the upper parish hall was constructed. In 1911 there was a typhoid epidemic and there was no hospital in Torrington. The Armory was not allowed to be used. The Trinity Church treated and housed over 100 patients at this location when no other help was available for these patients, most of whom survived. In 1982 the church talks about domestic abuse and the Susan B. Anthony Project was started. In 1983 the church was asked to start a soup kitchen. In 2003 the pastor at the time found people sleeping in the Trinity Church courtyard outside in the cold. In 2003 Operation Overflow began with four churches involved. The historic operations were reviewed by Mr. Sinkowich. In 2020 COVID arrived, and the State of CT provided money for two years of shelter. Then the shelter in Winsted opened. Mr. Sinkowich said Mr. Simoncelli could not find churches or businesses to host the shelter. Last week, the Northwest Hills Church was not approved for a shelter.

Greg Brisco, CEO of YMCA, 259 Prospect St., Torrington appeared and shared their experiences with homelessness and the Winsted operations were reviewed. The YMCA in Torrington has 42 supplemental apartments. Over the past twenty years, there have been over 2,000 people going through the Winsted shelters on to more permanent housing. The average number of people staying each night at the Winsted shelter is 33 during cold weather operations. All people come through the 211 system, and the 211 operations were reviewed by Mr. Brisco. The admissions packet was reviewed. This is a low barrier shelter, as they receive State funds. Behavior is the key, bags are checked, and no drugs, alcohol or weapons are allowed. Staffing and operation hours were reviewed. The in-take process begins at the Soup Kitchen.

Leonard Bosco, 129 Hoerle Blvd., Torrington appeared as the Coordinator for the YMCA Shelter. Mr. Bosco explained he is the one who determine who comes into the facility, where people stay and who goes. He oversees disciplinary issues. There are 10 monitors and one lead monitor who are all trained. Two are members with full EMT training, but not certified EMT providers. Mr. Bosco reviewed the intake process (at 25 min into meeting).

The safety of guests and the community is their highest priority. Mr. Bosco noted various comments from Commissioners and City Planner at the previous shelter meeting for NW Hills at 342 Prospect Street. Some guests will have cars, leaving the shelter for child drop offs or their jobs. They have only a few smokers in their guest groups.

Mr. Bosco noted the police report incidents, and in Winsted most incidents occurred between 5-10 p.m. He spoke about the bus transportation between Torrington Soup Kitchen and the Winsted shelter. The transportation issues have since been resolved, as they now use a YMCA bus. There are over 100 homeless individuals in Torrington. The larger City of Waterbury has less homeless individuals than Torrington due to their vouchers and other programs and resources. There is overwhelming public support for these shelters.

Sarah Toomey, Greenwoods Counseling, Wallens Hill Road in Barkhamsted appeared. She also works in Torrington to create overflow services in Torrington such as counseling, job assistance, treatment programs, etc. It is disheartening to hear disrespect and stigma from leaders in our community. We need to do better for our neighbors and friends and teach empathy and respect. Many unhoused people work, support local businesses and pay car taxes. They recognize some people struggle with substance abuse and mental health issues. She noted 92% of overdoses occur in a home.

Ms. Toomey provided brief examples of their (anonymous) unhoused individuals and their situations. She has a 1,267 signatures on a petition, and 676 are from Torrington residents. The petition was submitted for the record.

Mr. Leifert read a list of documents that are included in the record file. Mr. Leifert read his memo to the Commission dated December 27, 2023 (at one hour into meeting).

Mayor Elinor Carbone appeared and noted and recognized the efforts and work this Commission has put forward in considering these application, 6.5 hours of hearings thus far, in particular during this holiday season. It is imperative the public recognize the decision of this Commission will have a long term impact on this community, and the voices of Torrington residents, business owners, students, homeless and the voices of those from Torrington must bear a stronger impact on the issue than any representatives from other cities and communities. Mayor Carbone thanked Ms. Toomey for taking the time to separate out the number of Torrington signatures on the petition.

Mayor Carbone wanted to place on the record that after the last decision meeting of this Commission, she has been authorized to access the ARPA funds set aside for social services, feasibility studies, etc., and with those funds they were able to procure 15 hotel rooms made immediately available which are housing 32 people in two separate hotels.

Mayor Carbone expressed her gratitude to the YMCA and Len Bosco. This hotel situation is not ideal as it is very expensive. She does not want anyone in this room to think this City is uncaring and hasn't taken the time to consider these deliberations to secure a homeless shelter. She urged public comments be kept brief tonight so that this Commission will have the time this evening to make a decision. Mayor Carbone expressed her gratitude to this Commission for their commitment and time on these applications.

Mr. Perosino asked if State funds come with any stipulations. Mr. Brisco of the YMCA responded no, just that folks cannot be excluded, and behavior is considered for entry. Mr. Perosino asked questions regarding areas for families, children, women, men. YMCA had said women and children are their priority.

Mr. Mele noted the 220 police calls, and asked if the increased police calls and staffing were discussed.

Mr. Mele inquired about parking for vehicles, and Rev. Combs responded they have an overnight parking site across the street on Prospect Street.

At 8:14 p.m. Commissioners read into the record public comments letters and emails that were received.

At 8:35 p.m. public comments were taken from audience members.

Mayor Carbone commented the amount she was authorized to use for hotel housing is \$40,000 through December 27, 2023 and if we need to extend that, it is possible. She is speaking with Brian Mattiello of Hartford Healthcare to discuss next steps to keep people sheltered.

At 9:15 p.m. comments were received from the public via zoom.

Mr. Mele thanked Mr. Brisco and Mr. Bosco for the additional information and detailed operation info brought forth tonight, which included what is bring accomplished and the protocol that is in place. There is a definite need, and the problem needs to be fixed moving forward instead of relying upon these shelters. Without the funding and support from the Mayor, this would be an ugly situation.

Mr. Mele thanked the Mayor, City Council and all Planning and Zoning Commission members for their support.

Mr. Riley thanked Mr. Mele for the meeting procedures and work on this matter. This is just the zoning portion, the planning portion needs to be started earlier and it is an on-going situation that won't be resolved tonight.

Mr. Mele noted a public comment made by Mr. Grant, where there were 92,000 meals served at the Soup Kitchen, with approximately 200 calls to police. He appreciates that input, as it puts everything in perspective. He commended the church for handling the Soup Kitchen.

Commissioner Diane Carroll thanked the public and the Commission for their input, much information has been received.

Rev. Combs inquired if the 309 signature petition could be entered into the record as a petition of support of this application, instead of being in opposition to previous proposal.

Mr. Mele noted that the 309 petition is associated with another application (342 Prospect Street).

Mr. Leifert stated he can make a copy of that petition and so note it and enter it into this current application file of 220 Prospect Street.

Rev. Combs thanked the Commission and explained the ownership of the church real estate relating to the Special Exception. This is a critical part of their mission and encouraged the Commission to consider their application favorably.

At 9:27 p.m. Mr. Mele declared the public hearing closed.

MOTION by Ms. Greco to APPROVE Special Exception 23-08 and Site Plan 1481

Applicant: Carrie A. Combs, Trinity Episcopal Church

Location: 220 Prospect Street

Proposal: Cold weather emergency homeless shelter  
Section 3.1, Subsection 2.0

with the following conditions and recommendations:

1. Based on comments from the City Planner in his memo of December 27, 2023 to the Planning and Zoning Commission, the Planning and Zoning Commission retains jurisdiction for review of this application as a special exception, as the use as an overnight shelter for the unhoused is not a protected religious use under RLUIPA or the CT RFA.
2. The applicant shall follow comments of Nate Nardi-Cyrus, Assistant Planner outlined in his December 14, 2023 email to the City Planner specific to lighting.
3. The Planning and Zoning Commission finds that the proposed use, location and site design is compatible with the neighborhood and surrounding uses, is less likely based on evidence in the application record and comments by city staff to have a detrimental effect upon churches, schools, libraries, playgrounds, or similar facilities found in Section 2.00 - 2.60 of the Table of Permitted Uses and is reasonably protective of the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of the City of Torrington.
4. The applicant shall ensure compliance with fire and building codes for overnight occupancy and number of occupants for shelter use
5. The request for waiver of submission of a site plan is approved as no exterior site work is proposed
6. The operation of the shelter shall be 8:30PM to 7:00AM , 7 days per week from November 1 to April 30 each year
7. In accordance with Connecticut General Statutes Section 8-3c, a certificate of special exception shall be filed on the land records with the City Clerk prior to commencing the use or construction associated with this approval.

Motion seconded by Mr. Perosino.

Commissioners voting in favor of the motion:

Donovan Riley

Diane Carroll

Donna Greco

Greg Perosino

Greg Mele

Motion unanimously carried.

4. **Adjournment:**

MOTION by Mr. Perosino to adjourn at 9:30 p.m., seconded by Ms. Carroll, unanimously carried.