Written by Carol Pomeday
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## Owner of three houses envisions 4-day workshops in serene lakefront setting

A proposal to hold four-day art workshops at three lakefront houses on Silver Beach North in the Town of Belgium drew opposition from residents who said the sessions would disturb the tranquility of their neighborhood.

A public hearing held April 14 by the Plan Commission on Deborah Kern's request for a conditional-use permit to operate the art school drew enough residents to fill the hall.

The commission said it would look at the properties before making a recommendation to the Town Board on May 15.

Kern owns Nature Garden and Anaba Tea House in Shorewood, where art classes are held in a rooftop garden and greenhouse in the spring and summer.

Under the name Firefly: A Lakefront School of the Arts, Kern envisions workshops held at 6684, 6692 and 6698 Silver Beach North. The sessions would be held

from Thursdays to Sundays twice a month and have about eight students, she said.

Kern plans to use a house at 6684 for students and a one-bedroom house at 6698 for artists. Classes would be held in a garage that's been converted to a studio and Kern would live in the other house.

"The houses needed a facelift. She hasn't overbuilt or overused or abused the land," said Sally Schuster, who lives nearby and is helping Kern with the project.

Schuster's grandparents built some of the cottages and helped establish the beach community.

"Deb's very much into the environment and what our community has to offer," Schuster said. "It's our intent to share the space with artists and students who enjoy nature and respect the properties and surroundings."

David Bowman, who lives next to the house earmarked for student lodging, objected to the school, saying it would infringe on his family's privacy and enjoyment of their property.

"This house is our sanctuary to relax and enjoy quality time with our family," Bowman said. "This is a private road. You're essentially traveling across people's back yards. I'm concerned about property values, traffic and safety. It seems a dangerous precedent and would be a Pandora's box."

His wife said there were problems when Kern allowed others to use the house last summer, but they didn't complain, wanting to be friendly neighbors.

"This is a residential area, not a business area," said resident Trent Schanen, whose parents also live on the road.

However, Bob and Carol Schmidt, who bought their property 10 years ago, said they support Kern's proposal.

"I had some concerns about it, but when I heard what the plan is and saw the list of classes she's proposed, it's quite a venture. We believe it is very positive to the environment and to the neighborhood. I don't see it having an egregious impact on our privacy. We believe this can be worked out to the sense of ecology that

we’re all about on Sandy Beach North,” Carol Schmidt said.

Another neighbor said, “I think it’s pretty exciting to have the possibility of an instructional art school in our neighborhood. She took a place that needed work and made it into a beautiful, serene residence. Isn’t that what we all want for our properties?”

Bowman acknowledged Kern did a good job restoring the houses, but noted everyone on the road has invested in their properties.

“One of the things we like about our properties is that they’re off the radar and we would like that to continue,” he said.

When someone questioned wether Kern would pay more to plow and maintain the private road, Schuster said she does the work using the neighborhood jeep. Kern pays for three properties, she said.

Schuster said breakfast and lunch would be provided and students would be encouraged to go to area restaurants or cook in the cottages for the evening meal. Students would not be driving in and out of the properties during the day, she said.

The artists, she said, would make less noise than if Kern rented the properties by the month or week.

The three properties are at the north end of the private road, just into a wooded area that extends to the end of the road where John Bowers lives. Bowers sent a letter supporting the project.

Town Clerk Ginger Murphy said the Plan Commission received two letters in favor of the proposal and four against it.

Kern said she considered forming a nonprofit organization to operate the school, but decided not to. The properties would remain on the tax rolls.

“This isn’t going to be a full-time job. I already have that,” she said. “It’s just a way to help pay for the properties and share them with others who would enjoy them.”

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FIREFLY: A LAKEFRONT School of the Arts is proposed by owner Deborah Kern (right) and neighbor Sally Schuster on three properties Kern owns on Silver Beach North. Photo by Sam Arendt