

**READINGTON TOWNSHIP BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT**

**MINUTES**

**November 21, 2006**

**Chairperson Fort called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. announcing that all laws governing the Open Public Meetings Act had been met and that the meeting had been duly advertised.**

**A.**

<b>Mrs. Fort</b>	<b>present</b>
<b>Mrs. Flynn</b>	<b>present</b>
<b>Mrs. Goodwin</b>	<b>present</b>
<b>Ms. Hendry</b>	<b>absent</b>
<b>Mr. Stettner</b>	<b>present</b>
<b>Mr. Shepherd</b>	<b>absent</b>
<b>Mr. Staats</b>	<b>present</b>
<b>Mr. Thompson</b>	<b>present</b>
<b>Mr. Denning</b>	<b>present</b>

**Donald Moore, Esq., Kelleher & Moore  
Brent Kasner, Clarke \* Caton \* Hintz**

- 1. CharDham Hindu Temple/Readington  
Use Variance & Preliminary Site Plan  
25A Coddington Road  
Action date: November 21, 2006**

**Madam Chair stated that this is a special meeting to conclude the testimony of the Hindu priest, Mr. Bhatt since the board was informed by the applicant's counsel that the interpreter will be leaving the country soon for three months.**

**Lloyd Tubman, Esq., of Archer & Greiner stated that Mr. Bhatt testified in June and July. The applicant appreciates the special meeting accommodation.**

**Ms. Tubman indicated for the record that the applicant's engineer is present this evening. If time allows, Ms. Tubman wanted to begin the site plan review. Madam Chair stated that since the board's engineer was not present and that the planner sent a substitute from his firm she was reluctant to open this portion of the hearing without them being here first hand.**

**Mr. Bipin Gunvantral Desai and Mr. Yogendra Bhatt who were previously sworn and remained under oath.**

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

**Fred Barden 9 Tunis Cox Road. He asked if Mr. Bhatt was a US citizen. Mr. Bhatt answered through Mr. Shah that he attained a green card which he described as a permanent residence card.**

**Mr. Barden asked that since the religion was strict, would that limit the amount of parishioners. Mr. Bhatt answered yes.**

**Mr. Barden asked if he knew of other Hindu religions that allowed drinking, or smoking or the use of drugs and the vegetarian diet. Mr. Bhatt answered that he did not know. He stated that in time one could see the difference as you go deeper into his form of Hindu religion. Mr. Bhatt stated that if someone belongs to another branch of Hindu religion, they will not come to us. If they do not belong to any other branch, then later on they will find out the differences between our branch of religion and the other branches of religion.**

**Mr. Barden asked if it was Mr. Bhatt's idea to worship the deities represented in the CharDham. Mr. Bhatt answered yes.**

**Mr. Barden asked if all Hindus are charged with making a pilgrimage to worship at the 4 temples. Mr. Bhatt answered yes, those who believe in the Char Dham. He did not believe that each and every Hindu wishes to make the pilgrimage to Char Dham. Mr. Bhatt explained the differences between the Char Dham in India and the Char Dham temple he is planning to establish. In India, there is no temple which has been addressed as Char Dham. The Badrinath Temple is known only as Badrinath Temple and Rameshwar Temple is known only as that Rameshwar Temple. Dwarkanath Temple is known only as Dwarkanath Temple and Jagannath Temple is only known as Jagannath Temple. He continued that in India, these are the four temples. They are not interconnected and they are not all in one place. He stated that here they are trying to establish to eliminate the differences that are in the small temples in India.**

**Madam Chair asked if there are any examples of other temples that have combined temples in India in this country and where the membership has been limited. Mr. Bhatt answered no, he did not have an example of that.**

**Mr. Barden stated that during his research, he has found out that there are approximately 120,000 people a year which perform the full Char Dham pilgrimage in India. He asked why this temple would not be so popular. It would allow people to perform the pilgrimage. Mr. Bhatt answered that he did not believe that the people that he has met were so enthusiastic about it.**

**Mr. Barden asked if there was a religious significant in allowing only 150 members to worship at a time. Mr. Bhatt answered that they have an arrangement which will have 75 people sitting in front of one deity. There is no religious significance to the figure.**

**Mr. Barden asked if there was a religious significance in limiting the membership to 150 members. Mr. Bhatt answered no.**

**Madam Chair asked Mr. Bhatt if the corporation owned the land. Mr. Bhatt answered that they are under contract. They are purchasing the property for \$925,000.**

**Mr. Barden asked if Mr. Bhatt planned on building a community center. Mr. Bhatt answered that right now there are no plans for a community center.**

**Mr. Barden asked what is it about this specific piece of property which is not zoned for a house of worship that makes it specifically valuable as a site for this temple. Mr. Bhatt answered that it was conveniently located for their purpose.**

**Mr. Barden asked if the Mr. Bhatt had ever built another temple in the United States. Mr. Bhatt answered that he had not. Mr. Barden wanted to know how then did Mr. Bhatt estimate how many people would be attending. Mr. Bhatt answered that in his opinion, this is based upon the number of devotees and followers of this Char Dham Temple.**

**Chairman Fort asked if there was a financial commitment by the devotees. Mr. Bhatt answered yes**

**The board took a break at 9:27 pm.**

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

**Ms. Broidrick stated that she resides at 9 Tunis Cox Road. She asked if Mr. Bhatt had a plan to turn potential worshippers away. Mr. Bhatt answered yes. They may have to build another temple.**

**Ms. Broidrick asked if there was going to be a way of keeping track of the membership. Mr. Bhatt answered that they would know when the members take their oath.**

**Mr. Thompson asked if they would plan to build another temple on this property. Mr. Bhatt answered no.**

**Mrs. Goodwin asked if Mr. Bhatt had applied for a green card. Mr. Bhatt answered that a green card and visa are two different things. When he came to America he claimed that it was for religious reasons. He was given a special status of an immigrant because he was a priest.**

**Andrew Kokinda, stated that he resides at 5 Tunis Cox Road. He wanted to know what Mr. Bhatt anticipated to be the maximum distance a member would travel to attend this temple. Mr. Bhatt answered that at this stage it is difficult for him to guess.**

**Mr. Kokinda asked if the 4 priests would come from India. Mr. Bhatt answered yes. They will stay in apartments.**

**Mr. Kokinda wanted to know what Mr. Bhatt's monthly compensation is. Mr. Bhatt answered \$2,000 per month.**

**Pat Sellino, Coddington Road. Ms. Sellino wanted to know what the 4 holidays were. Mr. Bhatt answered that they have four Dhams, Char Dham means four Dhams. Char means four, which are four festivals. One festival for four Dhams.**

**Ms. Sellino asked if food would be left at the site. Mr. Bhatt answered that in the temple's kitchen they will not be cooking prashad. Whatever will be brought from outside will be warmed in the kitchen.**

**Ms. Sellino wanted to know if Mr. Bhatt was aware that there are endangered turtles on the site. Mr. Bhatt answered that they are taking steps to preserve those species in their environment.**

**Ms. Savita wanted to know how many days would each festival last. Mr. Bhatt answered one day.**

**Ms. Savita wanted to know who would sponsor the day's prayer for the other services that will be held at the temple. Mr. Bhatt answered that the prayer meetings will only be held on Sunday.**

**The meeting was carried to December 21, 2006 without further notice. At this meeting it is anticipated that the engineer and landscape architect will be present. Mr. Bhatt and Mr. Desai will continue during the month of March.**

**B. ADJOURNMENT:**

**Mr. Denning made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Thompson seconded the motion. *Motion was carried with a vote of ayes, nays none recorded***

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Linda A. Jacukowicz**