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# Township vote paves the way for Ann Arbor suicide prevention residential center

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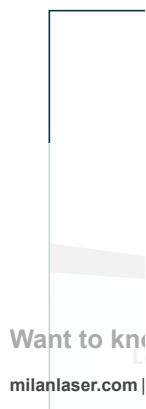


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WASHTENAW COUNTY, MI - A nonprofit's plan to transform [a multimillion-dollar home](#) outside Ann Arbor and its surrounding wooded acreage into a retreat-like center for young people struggling with anxiety and depression has cleared a key hurdle.

By a 5-2 vote on Monday, July 17, the Superior Township Board of Trustees OK'd a rezoning for the 76-acre property along North Dixboro Road, approving a request from [Garrett's Space](#), the Ann Arbor nonprofit behind it.

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The decision paves the way for the project — a proposition that has [sparked fierce opposition from some neighbors](#), as well as [resounding endorsements from top officials, mental health clinicians and people with personal experience with mental illness and suicide](#).

“It was a difficult process, but it was really heartwarming that we had such an incredible turnout and so many mental health experts, other nonprofit organizations and individuals who have lived experience with mental health challenges and suicide of close family members speak out so passionately in favor of what we’re doing,” said Scott Halpert, who along with his wife Julie leads Garrett’s Space.

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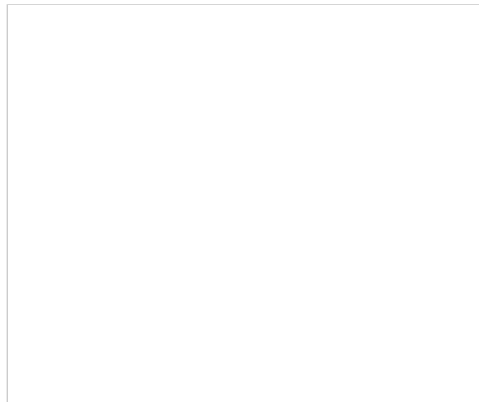


The organization is named for the couple's son Garrett, who died by suicide in 2017. The Halperts said they hope stays at the center will provide young people with the kind of help their son needed, offering support groups and activities like art, music, medication and yoga.

The project, backed by \$4 million in federal funding, involves using the existing 5,000-square-foot home on the property and building another roughly 12,000-square-foot residential center and a 2,000-square-foot "creativity studio" around the existing house.

It has received the endorsement of local officials, ranging from Washtenaw County's health officer, to every member of the county's delegation of state representatives and local congresspeople, as well as psychiatrists and clinicians at the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University.

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Supporters continued to urge approval of the rezoning on Monday, with Ann Arbor City Council Member Linh Song, former Ann Arbor City Attorney Stephen Postema and Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commissioner Dan Ezekiel all addressing the township board.

But for some Superior Township residents, many living in the vicinity of the project, this project has no place in the agriculturally-zoned area near rural residential neighborhoods, regardless of the importance of the nonprofit's mission.

In scores of letters and verbal testimony to the township — some speaking through an attorney representing nearby property owners — opponents argued the rezoning facilitating the Garrett's Space project ran contrary to the township's master plan, sticking out inappropriately amid large-lot residential homes and farmland.

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The rezoning would set a precedent that the township's planning policies can be ignored, nearby resident Doug Dail told township leaders ahead of the Monday vote.

"If you do that, you're going to get a tidal wave of developers coming in here, and we're going to look like Canton Township," he said.

Others, like Superior resident Marjorie Brawer, called the rezoning improper, saying there were other appropriately zoned options for Garrett's Space.

"Your constituents want the laws upheld. This rezoning is not legal," Brawer said. "This vote will long be remembered as a pivotal moment in the township."

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The team behind Garrett's Space, in presenting its project, has disagreed with that perspective, asserting the center fits within the township's master plan and would be substantially less impactful on the area than a residential development that could be permitted on the land if it were developed. They plan to seek a conservation easement for much of the property, the Halperts have said.

On Monday, township Supervisor Ken Schwartz seemed sympathetic to some of the residents' concerns, saying the rezoning could "significantly change the pattern of development" in the area of the project.

For at least 50 years, the township has stuck with a "narrow but reasonable" interpretation of its planning policies, particularly when it comes to preserving farmland and the rural character north of Geddes Road, he said.

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“We tout that Superior Township holds the line against development inconsistent with the master plan, and that our master plan is thoughtful and has the backing of our residents,” Schwartz said.

He added that the argument was key in the township’s ongoing legal battle with Salem Township and developers of the Salem Springs project to the north over a sewer line they want to run through Superior. The courts look for a pattern of legislating in accordance with planning policies when challenges arise, he said.

Schwartz joined Trustee Nancy Caviston in voting against the rezoning request during its second and final reading on Monday, with Clerk Lynette Findley, Treasurer Lisa Lewis and Trustees Bernice Lindke, Bill Secrest and Rhonda McGill giving it the majority it needed to pass.

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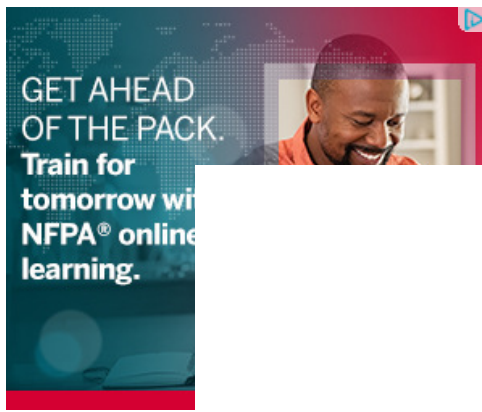
Township leaders said they had done their homework, listening and reading to all of the input on the rezoning.

“I would hope that when we walk out of here tonight that you understand that in our heart of hearts we believe that we are doing the right thing on behalf of this community. We are looking for the future,” said McGill.

The township master plan is a guide, but it doesn’t detail every use for every property, Lindke added.

“The plan is not black and white. It’s meant to be flexible. It has that flexibility built into it because it acknowledges that the future is uncertain, that times change, that we keep up with those times,” she said, adding the project would maintain the rural character of the area, address a needed service in the township and preserve between 55 and 60 acres.

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That's a much better way to protect the neighborhood's natural areas than opening up the property for development as a subdivision, said Secret, who noted he still had "great heartache" for neighbors who felt offended by the project.

Even with the vote, the project has more steps before it gets a full green light. Garrett's Space must still go through site plan review, likely at least a nine-month process, Scott Halpert said.

"One thing that struck us is just the incredible amount of amount of enthusiasm and support for what we're doing, in our community, in our county, just across the board," he said.

*Resources are available for those seeking mental health treatment and support. Anyone experiencing distress or thoughts of suicide can seek help from:*

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- *The 24-hour [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) by dialing 988*
- *The Ozone House, a 24-hour hotline for youth, at 734-662-2222*
- *The 24-hour hotline at University of Michigan Psychiatric Emergency Services at 734-936-5900*
- *The Washtenaw County Community Mental Health crisis team at 734-544-3050*

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