Good Morning,

After careful consideration, Claratel Behavioral Health has decided to end the Wesley Chapel intellectual and developmental disabilities residential development project. All construction work has stopped, and we will cancel the community meeting scheduled for 6:30 p.m. at Southwest DeKalb High School. Our contractors are working on securing the site and installing additional erosion control.

Information distributed in the community describing the proposed development as a crisis center and the nature of the individuals to be served is completely inaccurate. This project was designed from the start to provide two single-family-style homes for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), such as individuals with autism and Down syndrome who need additional assistance with daily living.

Claratel is a public community service board established under Georgia law to provide essential services on behalf of the State. While Claratel maintains that it has legal authority to undertake this state-funded project, we recognize the importance of community engagement, open communication, and strong relationships with DeKalb County and the communities we serve.

We recognize that questions remain about the project's purpose, the individuals it was intended to serve, and the property selection process. We have prepared the following summary to address these concerns.

I. Purpose of the Project and Individuals Served

These homes were to be part of a statewide effort initiated by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) to increase capacity and access to specialized IDD residential care. Each home would accommodate no more than four adults. Trained caregivers would be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to help residents with meals, personal care, daily routines, health-related needs, and developing greater independence. The homes would use state-of-the-art materials and research-based design, serving as a model for the state.

The planned state investment included about $4.5 million in construction and an estimated $3.5 million annually for staffing and operations. The staffing model set a minimum starting wage of $20 per hour for direct care professionals with a high school diploma and included employee benefits.

II. Property Selection and Claratel's Residential Experience

Questions have been raised about why Claratel selected the Wesley Chapel property and whether it specifically targeted South DeKalb for this development, and our experience providing housing services.

The initial property search covered all of DeKalb County. After an extensive search, Claratel identified the Wesley Chapel property as meeting the needs for constructing two homes. The property previously received zoning approval for an eight-home residential development, and some initial infrastructure work was completed before the development was abandoned. The Claratel Board voted to approve the purchase. Commissioner Spears did not attend that vote.

Claratel has substantial experience operating residential homes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We currently operate eight licensed residential homes in DeKalb County, including six in North DeKalb and two in South DeKalb. Some of these homes have operated for more than 30 years.

These existing homes demonstrate that residential support for individuals with developmental disabilities is an established part of Claratel's work throughout the county, not a new service or an initiative limited to one community.

III. Claratel's Legal Status

Claratel is a community service board established under Georgia law. Under O.C.G.A. § 37-2-6(a), community service boards are public corporations and instrumentalities of the State created to perform essential governmental functions. Georgia zoning law clearly establishes that arms/instrumentalities of the State are exempt from local zoning regulations. As such, this project did not go before the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners.

Claratel's participation in the DeKalb County permitting process reflected our intent to work cooperatively with county government while fulfilling our responsibilities as a state entity.

IV. Communication with County Leadership and the Community

Claratel recognizes that communication and public engagement are essential to developing services within a community. Claratel has always sought to communicate with our county commissioners and officials, as well as our other community partners.

Claratel also hosted Inside Claratel events on September 18 and 30, inviting county commissioners and local leaders to learn more about our services and facilities. Representatives from Districts 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7 participated. During these events, we shared information about the Wesley Chapel development, the proposed construction, and the State's investment in expanding intellectual and developmental residential services.

V. Our Commitment Moving Forward

Ending the Wesley Chapel project does not change the need for specialized residential services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities or Claratel's responsibility to the individuals and families who depend on them.

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the same right as others to live in safe homes, participate in their communities, and be treated with dignity and respect. We also recognize the importance of listening to residents and addressing reasonable concerns about developments in their neighborhoods.

Our decision reflects our commitment to strengthening communication, maintaining constructive relationships with county leadership, and creating more opportunities for public engagement.

We appreciate the time and perspectives shared by residents, advocates, community leaders, and county officials. Claratel remains committed to working together to support individuals with disabilities while contributing positively to the communities we serve. Caring for vulnerable individuals and protecting the quality of life in the community are not competing goals. We can—and will—do both.

Thank you for your continued engagement and partnership.

Home Design:



1 SD-3.1 3D VIEW LOOKING @ WRAP PORCH

