

Amber Reineck House sues Howell for not allowing sober living home for women

Sean Bradley, Livingston Daily Published 4:59 p.m. ET Jan. 30, 2020 | Updated 11:43 a.m. ET Feb. 1, 2020

The City of Howell has been sued in federal court for preventing a sober living house exclusively for women to open there.

The Amber Reineck House, its founder Courtney Atsalakis, and the Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid Michigan filed a disability rights lawsuit against the city, Mayor Nick Proctor and Community Development Director Tim Schmitt.

[The lawsuit \(https://www.reلمانlaw.com/media/cases/826_Amber%20Reineck%20House%20v.%20City%20of%20Howell%20-%20Complaint%20_file-stamped_%20_1-27-20_.pdf\)](https://www.reلمانlaw.com/media/cases/826_Amber%20Reineck%20House%20v.%20City%20of%20Howell%20-%20Complaint%20_file-stamped_%20_1-27-20_.pdf) claims the city, Proctor, and Schmitt took "unlawful actions" to block the Amber Reineck House from opening in a home on the 300 block of South Walnut Street because of the disability of the home's future residents, according to a news release. Drug addiction is considered a disability under federal law.

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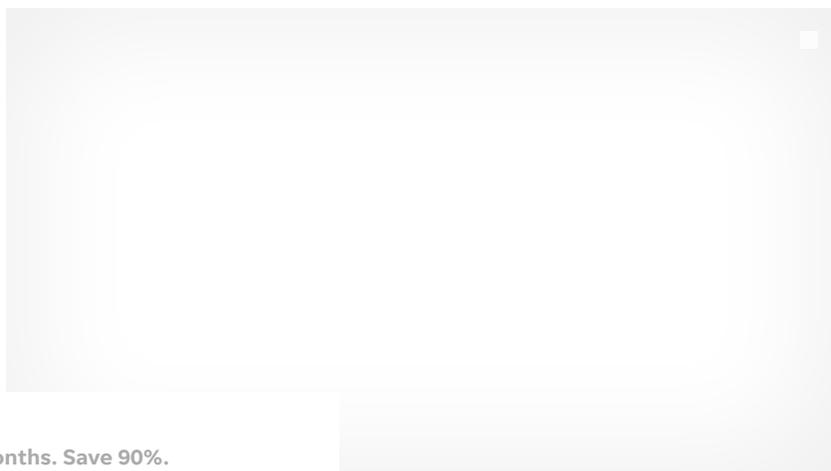
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The lawsuit seeks to allow the Amber Reineck House to open its sober living home in Howell, and to be awarded monetary compensation due to the city's alleged negligence on the issue, and to be awarded money to punish the city for its alleged conduct.

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"I founded Amber Reineck House with the goal of expanding supportive housing opportunities in Livingston County, where no recovery residences are currently available to women," Atsalakis said in a news release. "The city's actions have deprived women needing these services of a critical housing opportunity for nearly two years."

The lawsuit alleges the city, Proctor, and Schmitt did not allow the Amber Reineck House and other transitional housing to exist because of "significant community opposition" to the proposed home, the news release stated.

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In July 2018, many Howell residents came out against the idea of transitional housing, specifically sober living homes.

The lawsuit alleges the city has:

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- Imposed and repeatedly extended a "discriminatory" moratorium on special land use applications that would have allowed unrelated persons to live together in a single family home, preventing the house from operating.
- Refused a request by the Amber Reineck House for reasonable accommodations to the city's zoning requirements for residential neighborhoods.
- And proposed an amended zoning ordinance, which may be enacted as early as next month, that would impose a host of "discriminatory, unreasonable, and onerous burdens" on sober living homes and other group homes for people with disabilities.

The lawsuit was filed on Monday in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, according to a news release.

Lawyers for the Amber Reineck House and the Fair Housing Center of Southeast and Mid Michigan said the efforts by the city, Proctor and Schmitt to not allow the home and others like it are "concerted" and "ongoing" since April 2018, [when Atsalakis filed a special use permit with the city to open the sober living home for women.](#) [\(/story/news/local/community/howell/2018/07/02/proposed-addiction-recovery-house-howell-sets-neighborhood-edge/742393002/\)](#)

Proctor deferred comment Thursday to the city's attorney, Dennis Perkins.

"We're on it. We have knowledge of it," Perkins said.

The city will have to file a response to the lawsuit within 21 days from when the lawsuit was filed, Perkins said.

[In September](#) [\(/story/news/local/community/howell/2019/09/26/transitional-housing-regulations-howell-sober-living/2439540001/\)](#), the city introduced new ordinances for transitional housing within the city limits. The ordinances were later withdrawn and rewritten, while the moratorium - started in July 2018 for one year, then [extended multiple times](#) [\(/story/news/local/community/howell/2019/11/14/howell-housing-sober-living-fair-housing-center-of-southeast-and-mid-michigan-amber-reineck-house/2574431001/\)](#)- was extended until nearly the end of February.

On Monday, the City Council introduced revised ordinances for transitional housing standards, their licensing, and establishment of licensing fees.

The extended moratorium has not yet been lifted.

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