

Howell Facing Lawsuit Over Proposed Sober Living Home

January 31, 2020

A discrimination lawsuit has been filed against the City of Howell over a local non-profit's attempt to open a sober living home for women in recovery.

The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in Detroit by The Amber Reineck House, its Founder and President Courtney Atsalakis and the Fair Housing Center of Southeast & Mid Michigan. The suit names the City of Howell, Mayor Nick Proctor and Community Development Director Tim Schmitt and alleges violations of the Fair Housing Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, and Michigan's Persons with Disabilities Civil Rights Act. Courtney Atsalakis founded the Amber Reineck House in 2017 in memory of her sister, Amber Reineck, who died of a fentanyl overdose in 2015. The non-profit has been working to open a sober living home for women in Livingston County, where the only other sober living options are for men.



In July of 2018, the City instituted a moratorium for all special land use requests for un-related persons living together in single family residential districts in order to craft two ordinances. It's a specific type of housing not really addressed in codes and officials wanted to craft guidelines for those looking to apply. The City had received an application from the Amber Reineck House for a recovery supportive services home on South Walnut Street targeting women recovering from addiction but the application was eventually withdrawn and the moratorium enacted. The suit alleges the named defendants took various actions in direct response to significant community opposition to the proposed home, which was based on discriminatory bias against persons recovering from substance use disorders.

The ordinances would change zoning to modify standards for transitional housing uses and add standards for special accommodation uses while also creating a licensing process for uses approved as transitional housing facilities or sober living homes. After revisions were made, the proposed ordinances were sent back to the Planning Commission for a new public hearing. That was held but the Commission issued no formal recommendation. Since ordinance changes are involved, decisions are left entirely up to Council. City Council met this past Monday and officially introduced the revised ordinances. They are expected to be up for possible adoption at the next regular meeting.

Meanwhile the lawsuit seeks an injunction allowing Amber Reineck House to open its sober living home in Howell, compensatory and punitive damages, and other relief. City Attorney Dennis Perkins had no official comment on the lawsuit, saying it is normal policy to not comment on pending litigation. A copy of the complaint and the press release issued are attached. (JM)

Attachment: [Amber Reineck House Press Release final.pdf](#)

Attachment: [Amber Reineck House v. City of Howell - Complaint.pdf](#)

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