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Community Fights To Keep Foster Home Out

CENTERVILLE (WCCO) — A plan to house troubled teens in a home in the northeastern metro is off the table.

Thursday night, more than 100 angry neighbors packed into a front yard in Centerville on Hunters Trail to talk about their problems with the plan.

It all started a few weeks ago when Zumbro House, Inc. bought a foreclosed home. After starting to fix it up and move in some furniture, it didn't take long for them to realize they weren't welcome. A rock was thrown through the window just a few days ago.

Christopher Onken is the President of Zumbro House.

"They're disabled people. Their kinda caught in the middle to that kind of hostility," Onken said.

Onken operates 14 other adult foster homes around the metro. He's helped neighbors face their fears of the unknown before. He's never had to deal with something like this.

Paul Lundh lives across the street. He didn't like what he saw when he looked up his new neighbor online.

"We found out about them coming in here, really by accident. They didn't tell us anything," Lundh said.

That's been the main concern, the fact the neighborhood wasn't told this foster home was moving in. Under the law they can't be.

"It's discriminatory. You don't give notification for foster care any more then you'd give notification for John and Mary Smith moving in next door," Onken explained.

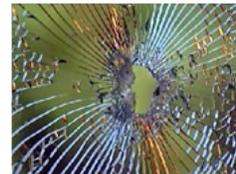
The original plan called for four teens with some sexual issues to live here. After such a strong reaction, Onken changed that to adults with disabilities.

"To our surprise and disappointment that didn't make a difference," he said.

A move canceled over controversy. Leaving an empty home behind, along with a lot of hard feelings.

"Nobody wins in a situation like this. It's regretted by everybody I think," Lundh said.

Onken had plans to open a second adult foster care home in Centerville. That too, however, has also been called off.



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