



Court upholds ruling against home for troubled teens

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YOUNGSTOWN — The 7th District Court of Appeals has upheld a township zoning appeals board ruling that a group home for emotionally and behaviorally troubled teenage boys doesn't belong in a single-family residential neighborhood.

A three-judge panel of the appeals court unanimously ruled Friday in support of the Ellsworth Township board's decision that the Redemption House group home, 11780 W. Western Reserve Road, does not constitute a single-family housekeeping unit as defined in the township zoning code.

In making its ruling, the appeals court backed an August 2008 ruling by Judge Timothy E. Franken of Mahoning County Common Pleas Court that affirmed the December 2006 ruling of the Ellsworth Township board.

"This is not the proper location for them to do this type of activity," said Atty. Scott Cochran, who represented neighbors opposed to the group home's location.

"There was nothing to indicate to us that this was, in any way, a family environment," he added.

The for-profit Redemption House holds a group-home license from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, but nobody at the group home is licensed as a foster parent for any of the juvenile residents, Redemption House owner George Syrianoudis told the township zoning board of appeals.

Township Zoning Inspector Diane J. Dudek told that board that the absence of a permanent adult resident at the group home and the supervision of up to 10 special-needs teenaged residents by rotating shifts of group home workers disqualified the group home from being classified as a single housekeeping unit.

In his appeal, Syranoudis said his log-cabin group home is a single housekeeping unit that constitutes a family under the township zoning ordinance.

However, the appeals court observed: "There is no evidence in the record to support the contention that the house is, in fact, a single dwelling unit. ... [The zoning appeals board and trial court] record reflects the use of the building is merely institutional."

While the case was pending before the appeals court, Atty. Mark Finamore, who represented the township, said the group home would be better suited for a commercial or multifamily dwelling zone.

Neither Syrianoudis, nor his lawyer, David Betras, could be reached for comment on Friday's decision.

The appeals court decision was written by Judge Mary DeGenaro, with Judges Joseph J. Vukovich and Cheryl L. Waite concurring.