

## Proposed City Group Home Under Fire

Posted By: Kayla Molczan on: May 23, 2018 In: Featured News

A Butler house currently being remodeled to become a group home for homeless female veterans is causing some controversy.

Some city residents showed up at Tuesday's Butler City Council meeting to voice concerns that this type of home, and its potential clients, would not be good for the neighborhood.

Elizabeth Orsborn lives near the home on East Pearl Street. She spoke in front of Butler City Council on Tuesday.

"It would not be prudent or healthy to put these women with addiction issues, mental health issues and military sexual trauma in an area where there is already drug activity," Orsborn said.

The group home is under the direction of an organization called "Robin's Home," which is named after a female veteran who served in the Army and was deployed in support of Desert Storm. After discharge, Robin has been receiving treatment for sexual trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder, and also required surgery for a medical condition. Robin passed away in January 2017 due to complications from the surgery.

Mary Chitwood, an organizer and volunteer with the group, spoke about the effort to Butler Radio last week.

"It's supportive housing for female veterans and their children in need," Chitwood said in an interview. "As long as the females are in the home and working on their goals that we helped set for them, then they can stay there until we're able to transition them to permanent housing."

Chitwood says currently, no agency in Butler County provides emergency housing to homeless female veterans and their children.

A Butler businessman, Dennis Baglier, purchased the home at 401 East Pearl Street and work has already begun to rehab and prepare it to house up to 10 residents. Funding has come from federal grants and private donations. Last weekend, Butler Radio's The Rock Station helped sponsor a concert at the American Legion 778 in Lyndora in support of the effort. Over \$2,300 was raised.

Butler City Zoning Officer John Evans said in an interview on Wednesday that his office issued a cease and desist letter to the property owner in late April explaining that this project would be considered a transitional dwelling unit under the determination of the city's solicitor, which would need special approval from the city zoning board before it could open.

Evans says the people behind the project did not notify the city at all before buying or starting work on the home. To be clear, rehab work can continue at the house, Evans says, but the home can't open until given special approval.

"The cease and desist order has nothing to do with the work...it has everything to do with the occupancy of the structure," he said.

The city has sent the property owner, Baglier, a letter detailing all the application information required in order for a project like this to move forward.

If this project continues to be pursued, the special exception would go before the city zoning board, who would make a final determination. The issue would not go before mayor and council like in the case of conditional use units, according to Evans.

Following the zoning board's decision, there would be a 30-day appeal period where the property owner could appeal to the court of common pleas if they were not happy with the outcome.

