

For Immediate Release:

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"OZONE HOUSE SUES CITY"

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Ann Arbor, MI- On Tuesday, June 3rd, Ozone House, a non-profit agency that provides housing and support services, filed suit in Washtenaw County Circuit Court against the City of Ypsilanti alleging a violation of state and federal laws by the City's actions on May 14th.

On that date, the City's Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) ruled that the City's ordinance, which permits "residential uses", did not permit Ozone House to lease two apartments to individuals who are 18-21.

This decision came despite the fact that the current landowner leases the two apartments in question, and that this use is explicitly permitted in the City's Zoning Ordinance.

David Nacht, attorney for Ozone House, noted, "The City completely ignored the language of its own ordinance and made a decision unsupported by law or the record. The only way to make sense of the decision is to see it in the context of the hostility that the Mayor and some members of the Ypsilanti Downtown Development Authority (DDA) are showing towards Ozone House's planned investment in Ypsilanti."

Ozone House Executive Director Mary Jo Callan said, "Despite this unfortunate position which the City has forced us into, I am hopeful that we can come to a just resolution where the needs of the City's citizens, especially its young people, are put first."

Ozone House has leased a storefront in downtown Ypsilanti since 1999, and has provided services to hundreds of youth from Ypsilanti at no cost to the City. The organization seeks to purchase the building it currently leases, including the two upstairs apartments. Once purchased the agency will make extensive improvements, and lease the apartments to young adults aged 18 to 21, as part of a permanent housing initiative. Currently, the building at 30 N. Huron has been for sale for four years.

"We are sympathetic to the desire of the City of Ypsilanti to improve its downtown image, and are prepared to invest over hundreds of thousands of Federal, State, Local, and private dollars to help that cause. It is difficult to understand how the City could be opposed to this, especially at a time when it is cutting services to its young people," Callan added.

At the ZBA meeting, the representative of the DDA stated that their organization would prefer to see two lawyers living in the apartments.

Nacht noted, "Cities become great and attract investment by respecting private property rights, not by subverting the meaning of words because they prefer one group over another. The action of the ZBA and of the City leading up to that decision against my client demonstrate the sort of governmental activity that discourages investment by the private sector."

"This is an established, and award winning organization that takes very seriously its role in the community, and its responsibility to help youth and families improve their life circumstances," added Nacht.

For more information, contact David Nacht, 663-7550 or 657-7754 or Mary Jo Callan 662-2222.