

The Michigan Daily

Moving up

Neighborhood should welcome Ozone House

When Ozone House, a counseling agency for homeless or runaway youth and their families, moves into their newly-acquired home at 1705 Washtenaw Ave., it appears that they will not be welcomed by their new neighbors with open arms and fresh baked goods.

Yesterday, representatives of Ozone finalized the purchase of the 92-year-old historic home on Washtenaw, the former Chi Psi fraternity house. It will serve as the new location for their offices and temporary shelter for five children ages 10 to 18.

However, the deal's completion came amidst much apprehension and protest from the Oxbridge Neighborhood Association. At Monday's Ann Arbor City Council meeting, the association raised two arguments against Ozone's move. First, they expressed concern that the move will violate Ann Arbor zoning codes and, second, they requested that the council postpone a vote that would give Ozone the additional money needed to purchase the \$405,000 house. The organization will fund its purchase with proceeds from the sale of Ozone's present home on Main St., private donations, a \$71,500 Michigan State Housing Development Authority grant and \$75,000 in city money.

The association claims that the preliminary zoning compliance given to Ozone House isn't satisfactory because it is inconsistent with zoning for the area and will create "parking problems." While the claim may be valid, it is irrelevant. The shelter's permit is temporary — the city has yet to make a final ruling on whether Ozone meets zoning requirements.

In actuality, the members of the Oxbridge Neighborhood Association may

be more concerned with themselves than potential zoning problems.

Although the neighborhood association opposed it, the city council unanimously decided to give Ozone House \$10,000 — in addition to a \$65,000 contribution approved several months ago — to make up the difference. The council should be commended for its support of a worthy organization.

The real motive fueling these arguments is clear: the association does not want Ozone House in their neighborhood. Apparently, it is willing to try anything to keep the shelter out. The issues that the association raised at the city council meeting were a shameless, last-minute attempt to find legal support against Ozone's legitimate move.

Members of the neighborhood association present a case of "not in my backyard." Ozone House is a reputable organization with a stellar record. Ozone volunteers — most of whom are University students — provide children with crisis-line counseling, mentorship and 24-hour supervision. Simply because Ozone helps homeless and runaway youth, area residents should not believe the move will increase crime or violence in their neighborhood.

Ozone House has benefitted the community for 27 years. The organization — faced with a flood of homeless and runaway children — has tried to obtain additional emergency shelter space for more than 20 years. A move to a larger facility will allow the organization to best serve the community. The Oxbridge Neighborhood Association must address the positive aspects of the move and should welcome Ozone House with open arms.

**Homelessness
in Ann Arbor:**
A two-part series