

Community

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we have found them in violation of the zoning laws and they have until the next meeting to present their case and show us justification."

Johnson said the organization has been given until the Aug. 1 meeting of the city's planning and zoning board to address the commission's findings.

Stack contends the business portion of Community Options is operated on Main Street; individual residences, he said are not businesses, but run much as a tenant/landlord relationship.

Stack said the U.S. Fair Housing Act prevents discrimination on the basis of disability and in the state of Kentucky, six to eight individuals with severe disabilities may live in single home maintained by agencies such as Community Options in both R1 and R2 classified zones.

"Up until the last 50 years or so in Kentucky, people with severe disabilities were limited to living in institu-

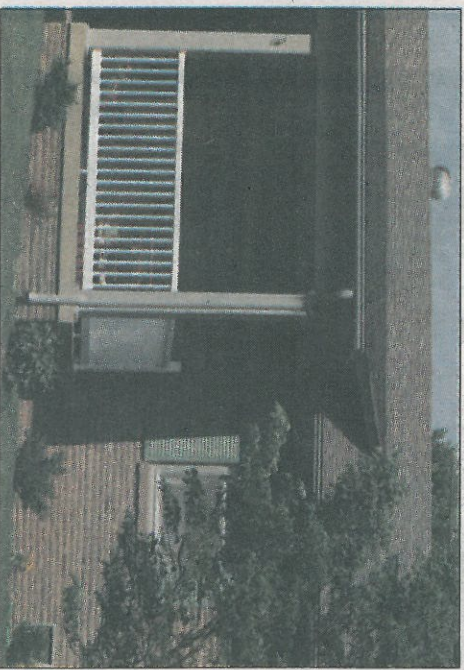
tions or nursing homes," Stack said. "That hinders any progress or growth for these individuals."

Currently, Community Options maintains 140 homes throughout its 10 state operating region. Stack said the organization has been in operation for 23 years nationwide and four years in Kentucky. Currently, four residences house individuals in Benton.

"We will only place two or three individuals in a single residence," Stack said. "And these people want the same things that anyone else wants. They want to make friends, they want to be a part of their community."

"Being a person with a disability never stopped anyone from being a good neighbor."

Stack said Community Options will likely host an "open house" at the residence within the next month to allow neighbors to become acquainted with the home's residents and the program.



— Mary Garrison/Tribune-Courier

Merrywood residents met with the Benton zoning board with concerns over a home by Community Options which houses severely disabled residents.

BENTON - Residents of Merrywood subdivision and the surrounding area in Benton appeared before the city's zoning board last week to voice concerns about the newest neighbor.

Community Options, Inc., Darnall, "I'm not opposed to the program at all, I think it's a great program. What I'm opposed to is the property value. I feel like my prop-

erty value has decreased quite a bit because this is a business," Community Options CEO Robert Stack, however, disagreed. Stack said a long-term study conducted by Julian Wolport of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars found the property value of areas in which Community Options residences are established either remains steady or increases in value.

"We make certain these homes are maintained in good condition," Stack said. "The lawn is always mowed and the home is always clean and in good order."

Stack also said the organization takes special care to remain inconspicuous to passersby.

"You'll notice we don't put any kind of signage out in the yard or on staff vehicles," Stack said. "We choose to be as invisible as possible. We want these homes to be

just like any other home in the neighborhood." Still, the question remains on the legalities of the facility in an R1 zone. City attorney Marty Johnson said numerous attempts by the City to reach a Community Options representative have been unreturned, and the city's zoning board is in uncharted territory. "We have no idea," Johnson said. "We've issued them a notice stating that

Residents raise concerns over business operating in residential zone

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