

Nonprofit wants to start a group home in Bordentown Township

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BORDENTOWN TOWNSHIP — A plan to start a group home for people with disabilities has drawn a mixed response.

The home proposed by Princeton-based Community Options Inc. would serve three or four individuals with developmental and possibly physical disabilities. The organization hopes to use affordable housing funds from the township for a down payment on a Independence Drive ranch house in Georgetown Estates that is up for sale.

Robert Heller, executive director of the nonprofit's properties in Burlington and Cumberland counties, on Tuesday night addressed residents' concerns about safety, both for area children and the home's residents, regulatory issues and the potential traffic impact. The Township Committee meeting drew more than 100 people.

The homes operate under 24-hour supervision and a full-time manager, are inspected yearly by the state Department of Human Services and receive quarterly visits from case workers, Heller said.

While there's no way to predict the traffic impact, he said, there wouldn't necessarily be an increased need for emergency vehicles.

Heller, who lives in the township, said that his two grade-school-aged kids have been in several of the homes he oversees and he never felt they were at risk.

The need for homes for people with disabilities is growing in New Jersey, he said, and the nonprofit wants to expand in northern Burlington County.

"In the near future, developmental centers are going to be closing. These people will need housing," said Heller, citing the pending closure of the Vineland Developmental Center.

No offer has been made yet in the home and the plan is still in the exploratory stages, according to Heller.

Under the Fair Share Housing law, the township nor its residents can stop the plan from moving forward, said Mayor Michael Dauber.

The township's affordable housing fund plan allows for nonprofits and faith-based organizations to open group homes, said Dauber, adding that the home is wheelchair-accessible and would be ideal for this particular use.

He said township officials plan to discuss residents' concerns with the state Department of Human Services and the state Department of Community Affairs, which regulates affordable

housing in municipalities.

"We're going to do what we can to address their issues within the bounds of the law and we're going to do whatever we can to get answers," Dauber said Wednesday.

If the plan moves forward, Heller said he would host an open house in hopes of demystifying the home's residents.

Community Options was founded in 1989 and operates in 37 cities in 10 states, according to its website, www.comop.org. The nonprofit has 13 homes in Burlington County in Evesham, Mount Laurel, Willingboro and Delran, Heller said.

http://www.phillyburbs.com/my_town/bordentown/nonprofit-wants-to-start-a-group-home-in-bordentown-township/article_ob900de5-0d3f-5580-a40c-93c73af4cb7c.html