

Battle for Jefferson Park

Campus neighborhoods, developers spar over 'mini-dorms'

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Homeowners surrounding the university have taken their battle against "mini-dorms" to a new level.

The escalating zoning conflict in the Jefferson Park Neighborhood led to homeowners taking civil action against developers.

The Jefferson Park Neighborhood Association filed a complaint of violation with the zoning administrator of the City of Tucson, targeting the development of several-bedroom "mini-dorms" in the neighborhood.

Residents of Jefferson Park, a neighborhood about one mile north of campus, have been fighting against the development of mini-dorms for almost 10 years, according to Bob Schlanger, a Jefferson Park resident and treasurer of the Jefferson Park Neighborhood Association. The complaint alleges these mini-dorms violate zoning codes in the neighborhood.

The neighborhood is designated under R-1 zoning, meaning residences should accommodate single families. Mini-dorms include up to seven bedrooms and often house students who are unrelated.

"A single-family home doesn't have seven separate suites," Schlanger said. "A single-family home, in this neighborhood, has two to four bedrooms. If a family or a group of people who have a long-term commitment to each other live in it, they share common access to the house. They live together in a traditional manner with the intent of living there for a prolonged time."

This battle has been described as legislation against students by many developers. Schlanger said the association is only trying to protect the integrity of their neighborhood.

"We're not here to talk about behavioral issues (of students)," Schlanger said. "We're simply asking the city to enforce the neighborhood code the way it was written."

The complaint names Goodman Group Dwellings as a specific development company that is not complying with R-1 zoning.

Developer Michael Goodman said his houses provide a necessary service for students.

"There's no question that there's a need for student housing," Goodman said. "And they're trying to get as close to the university as they can."

He said he typically builds houses with four to five bedrooms that could be used for single families.

"Any investor would love to have a family in it, but that's not who comes and rents," Goodman said.

The association filed the complaint Tuesday afternoon. The city is expected to respond within five days. The complaint may move up to the Tucson Board of Adjustment depending on the reply.

Goodman said he will take legal measures if his development is restricted.

"Are you kidding me? I just filed a lawsuit with them right now," said Goodman, referring to restrictions passed in Feldman's Neighborhood.

Development may be prevented while the complaint is in litigation.

"Once you file with the Board of Adjustment, there's a stay on activity that relates to the complaint," Schlanger said.

The neighborhood is also in the process of passing a design manual restricting construction and renovation of houses in Jefferson Park. Residents, developers and representatives from the City of Tucson have met regularly for over a year to discuss their positions.

Some residents said the meetings have not brought understanding between the groups.

"I think our positions are clear, but I don't think there has been any compromise," said Jefferson Park resident Joan Hall.

Dyer Lytle, who has lived in Jefferson Park Neighborhood for over 10 years, agreed both parties remain firm in their positions.

"I think we may have learned a bit from each other," Lytle said. "But I don't think we've come any closer to agreeing about things."