

Kent city officials say 10 group homes housing sex offenders must shut down

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A clash is underway in Kent between city officials and operators of 10 group homes that house sex offenders.

City officials have notified the group home operators that they must shut down because they are in violation of the city code for being too close to schools, child care facilities or other sex offender homes.

"We're trying to stop irresponsible group home operators from placing potentially dangerous sex offenders so close to children and schools," said Tom Brubaker, city interim chief administrative officer, in a Friday email. "We intend to enforce our code."

Eddie Weber, who operates six of the 10 homes found to be in violation of the city code, said he plans to continue to fight the city to keep his homes open for sex offenders. But Weber knows he faces an uphill struggle.

"My prognostication is I'm probably done," Weber said during a phone interview Friday.

That means a lot of sex offenders could have nowhere to go, and might end up homeless.

"There is no place to send them," Weber said. "They accumulate with me because I allow them in."

City staff found out that many homes, initially set up to house recovering drug addicts and alcoholics, had over time transitioned to housing sex offenders. State and federal laws limit city's regulations of the clean-and-sober homes but not restrictions of locations of group homes for sex offenders, Brubaker said.

The group home operators had until July 31 to comply with city code by having the sex offenders move out. The 10 homes have housed as many as 83 sex offenders at one time, according to city officials.

"We don't know how many sex offenders have moved out," Brubaker said. "Two operators have asked for another extension and one (Weber) has indicated he will not comply."

Weber said he opened his first clean-and-sober house for recovering drug addicts and alcoholics in 2001 in Kent. He now operates 11 in town. He claims the homes are still set up to be clean-and-sober homes.

"They're sex offenders but they are also recovering from drug and alcohol in the clean-and-sober program and I allow them into the program," he said.

For operators who don't comply, the city will send a notice of violation which is subject to a penalty of \$500 per home for each violation issued and the city can issue the violations daily. Brubaker said the city also can fine the property owners.

"Like with a traffic infraction, the notices are due and payable unless the violator contests the violation or requests a mitigation hearing," said Brubaker, who added there is a 14-day window to contest or mitigate the ticket.

Operators could go before the city hearing examiner to appeal the violation and then could appeal that decision to King County Superior Court.

"Some operators have 'lawyered up,' but no action or claim has been filed against the city as of this date," Brubaker

said.

Weber said he hopes to try to involve the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Fair Housing Act as a way to combat the city.

"I hope to bring it to a higher authority," he said.

The city appeal process to go to the city-hired hearing examiner has little appeal to Weber.

"The problem with that is you're fighting the city in the city's court," Weber said. "That's probably a slam dunk against me."

City staff found that one of the homes housed 17 sex offenders and is less than 500 feet from a child care facility and 400 feet from a public school, Brubaker said. The 2,200-square-foot-home has five bedrooms.

"We received written requests from 17 sex offenders claiming to live in that house asking not to enforce our code," Brubaker said.

Weber doesn't think any of the homes are that close to a day care facility or a school.

"I'm not aware of one," he said.

City officials initially sent out code violations to the 10 group homes on May 2 and asked them to discontinue operations of housing sex offenders by June 1. The city granted a 60-day extension at the request of several group home operators in order to transition existing tenants out of the homes.

"When we sent out the original letter, we estimated 83 registered sex offenders were located in these 10 group homes based on the data provided to Kent Police," Brubaker said.

A few property owners were glad the city enforced its code.

"It has come to the city's attention that many of the operators are actually tenants themselves, renting a home from the property owner, then 'subletting' the home to the group home tenants," Brubaker said. "Some property owners, in fact, wholly supported our efforts to terminate these uses when they found out the purposes to which their rental properties were put."

Weber said he notified his landlords about the city's plans to issue a violation. He said he doubts they would want to pay the penalties issued by the city and instead would evict him.

A few of Weber's group homes are in a small industrial area northwest of the intersection of Central Avenue and Willis Street.

"We provide a service and they are safe," Weber said. "They need a place to live."

The sex offenders come to the group homes after they serve their prison time. The state Department of Corrections issues a voucher to cover the costs of up to the first three months, Weber said. Many find jobs to cover the costs after the voucher runs out. Weber added that most are Level 1 sex offenders, the lowest risk to reoffend.

"It's important for these guys to have a place to live," Weber said.

But city officials said rules need to be followed.

"These operators' placement of sex offenders in these facilities violated those regulations," Brubaker said. "The operators were notified that they were breaking the law, and it is the city's obligation to make sure they comply with our laws and regulations for the protection of our community."

Editor's Note: For information about registered sex offenders in your neighborhood, go to the [King County Sheriff's](#)

[Office website and click on sex offender search.](#)

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