



INTO ACTION SOBER LIVING

12 Step Sober Living for Men and Women

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City of Manchester
Mayor's Office
Mayor Joyce Craig
One City Hall
Manchester, NH 0101

In Re: Request for Meeting

Dear Madam Mayor,

I am the co-owner and founder of Into Action Sober Living. We have been in operation in Manchester since 2017. As a certified member of the New Hampshire Coalition of Recovery Residences, we are committed to upholding the highest standards of practice. In 2020, 62 male and female residents, graduated from our homes and moved on to independent living, or returned to their respective homes, as contributing members of our local community.

I am in recovery and owe my life to the foundation that was built in a sober home. There, I learned to live with other men in a communal, family-style environment. We prepared meals and ate together, met in the evenings to discuss our struggles and accomplishments of the day, we prayed, cleaned, and socialized together, and ultimately supported one another as brothers. To this day, I am still clean and sober, and owe that to the vital experience I was given in sober living.

As New Hampshire has been crippled by addiction, we have seen an increasing number of treatment providers and sober homes open in our communities. Evidence shows that extended care, coupled with ongoing services, produces the most successful outcome for continued remission and abstinence. Sober homes play a vital role in transitioning individuals to independent living. Just yesterday on NHPR radio, I listened as you and the Mayor of Keene and Rochester discussed the lack of affordable housing around the state, the growing homeless population, and role that mental health and substance abuse plays in that crises. Our homes are unmistakably part of the solution to those very issues. I invite you to speak to a number of our residents who were part of the homeless statistic just months ago, but now are on the road to recovery and working towards independence. Contrary to the beliefs of some of our outspoken opponents, the same individuals that chant the old mantra "Not In My Back Yard", the expansion of available services and sober homes is the necessary response to the epidemic. Sober homes are a positive impact to our community, and a needed resource for so many individuals. They provide an environment where individuals can return to the workforce, patron our local businesses, and lessen the burden on our justice system. We should be working together to provide open access and building stronger recovery communities.

However, for the most part, we have not been supported by the municipality. Zoning cases have unlawfully ensued, building permits have been denied without just cause, and a level of a biased

scrutiny and protest has been directed towards us, making it quite clear that many within municipality do not wish to engage in constructive conversation. The Fire Department, Code Enforcement, Planning and Development, and the Zoning Board of Adjustment have all initiated proceedings against a number of homes with which I am associated. Even Waste Management has joined the onslaught by sending violation notices related to debris that is neither outside of the property nor belongs to our residents. This has been the theme for two years now, and in all honesty feels like harassment.

You and I met a couple years ago, along with Chief Goonan, to discuss life safety code requirements and the difficulties they presented both in their application and interpretation with respect to recovery residences. Our meeting was productive, and we ultimately received a favorable settlement with the State Fire Marshal which provided us certain exceptions to code requirements. I am requesting your audience once again.

Our difficulties are becoming so increasingly burdensome, our backs are against the wall. We have consulted with our attorney, Andrew Tine, Esq, and he has recommended filing a complaint in the US District Court and with the Department of Housing and Urban Development for violations of the Fair Housing Act, Americans With Disabilities Act, and failure to provide reasonable accommodation to local ordinances. Cases of sober homes in similar actions have been successful throughout the country. Most recently in 2020, the City of Methuen settled claims brought by Lincoln's House in Federal Court, and just before that the City of Malden lost a bench trial with Rise Above for failing to grant a reasonable accommodation. The underlying theme of all of the disputes, is that sober homes are neither boarding nor rooming houses, and instead they are a protected class of individuals that are living together like a family.

It is not our desire to go in that direction, and instead we wish to work together with the City of Manchester and with other municipalities around the state. However, if given no other choice, in order to preserve the safety of our residents and to take stand on a cause very personal to me, we will take the recommendations of our attorney.

At your convenience, we would be eager to meet with you to discuss a more productive, bilateral resolution to this issue. Thank you for time and interest with this matter.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Gerson
Jonathan Gerson
Into Action Sober Living
Co-Owner & Founder

Lamya Forghany
Lamya Forghany, Esq
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