



## Federal investigators to probe Framingham over SMOC case

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The MetroWest Daily News

Posted Mar 13, 2008 @ 11:09 PM

FRAMINGHAM — Already embroiled in a legal battle with South Middlesex Opportunity Council, the town has since drawn the attention of federal investigators over housing options for people with disabilities.

In a March 10 letter, Donna Murphy, deputy chief of the housing and civil enforcement section for the Department of Justice, on behalf of Steven H. Rosenbaum, chief of housing and civil enforcement, notified the town that the Justice Department has opened an investigation into the land-use in Framingham.

"We'd welcome their involvement, and, as we've consistently said in the past, we're ready to sit down and have a respectful dialogue about the issues that we've raised," said Jim Cuddy, SMOC's executive director.

On Oct. 24, 2007, SMOC, a nonprofit organization that serves the needs of the homeless and addicted, filed a lawsuit against the town, town officials, and certain residents for allegedly coordinating an effort to stymie expansion of the group's programming.

Specifically, an attempt to open Larry's House, a veterans shelter, and plans to move its Sage House program, which is a residential drug treatment program, were delayed, according to court documents.

The original complaint claims the campaign against SMOC and its clients has included "outrageous lies and outright threats," intended to "dehumanize the disabled population served by SMOC."

Jane Lane, spokeswoman for the organization, declined to expound on the investigation, but did welcome the newest development regarding the case.

"SMOC has no comment on the substance of the investigation, however, we welcome the involvement of the Department of Justice and we will provide our full cooperation," said Lane.

Town attorney Jeff Robbins, meanwhile, said the Justice Department is "making no allegations of any kind."

"They wanted to see the documents of the SMOC allegations," Robbins said yesterday afternoon. "And we'd be delighted to provide (the Justice Department) with every last scrap of paper."

As soon as the Department of Justice designates a person to review the case, Robbins said he likely would sit down and review the documents in April or May.

Federal government representatives declined comment, saying the matter was under investigation.

While the federal investigation was news to Cuddy, a letter from Justice Department dated Feb. 19 asks Town Manager Julian Suso to provide the federal government with town zoning ordinances, bylaws, building codes and all files and photographs relevant to SMOC within the past three years.

Suso declined to comment on the matter yesterday, noting that he is a defendant in the ongoing lawsuit.

A written statement of the Disability Law Center - a nonprofit that provides free legal service to the disabled in the state - indicates the Wayside Youth and Family Supports Inc., which serves children with disabilities, and Great Brook Valley Health Center, a community health center, have also sued the town in recent years.