

The METROWEST DAILY NEWS

Letter: Past time for negotiation

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Recently, a MetroWest Daily News editorial (Sept. 3, 2006) called for negotiation rather than litigation to resolve disputes between Framingham town officials and local social service agencies. While this imperative is constructive, it may represent too little too late.

This summer, Wayside Youth & Family Support Network filed a civil rights complaint against the town of Framingham, seeking to overturn the Selectmen's decision to deny Wayside's application for a Public Way Access Permit for its planned youth residential campus on Wayside's 14-acre property (off Rte. 9), designed for the purpose of educating and supporting children with mental illness or serious emotional difficulties, many of whom are victims of abuse or neglect.

This month, Great Brook Valley Health Center (GBVHC) also filed a civil rights suit against the town of Framingham for rejecting GBVHC's application to construct a new health clinic for the poor and indigent. GBVHC filed its application with the Planning Board more than two years prior to its eventual rejection. Numerous meetings and hearings were held, to no avail.

Wayside's process of seeking necessary town approvals for its campus began nearly five years ago, also resulting in final rejection by the town. Sadly, the opportunity to respond to MWDN's call for discussion and negotiation appears to have passed.

Wayside understands that legal action impacts both parties negatively. But we are in a position where we have no choice. Our organization is dedicated to the service of children and families, and it is our duty to be tenacious in their behalf.

Our commitment to such tenacity is rooted in the very founding of Wayside. One of our first programs was Harbinger House, which was started in 1977 by a group of Framingham residents concerned about the plight of runaway and abused teenagers, who banded together to open the area's first emergency shelter for teens. The opening of Harbinger House (on Arlington Street) was immediately opposed by neighbors who petitioned Framingham town officials to prevent its opening. The town refused to issue a Certificate of Occupancy, which prompted a two-year court fight. When the Harbinger House Board of Directors attempted to open the program without an Occupancy Permit, the town filed criminal charges. Cooler heads eventually prevailed, the appeal was victorious, and the program was allowed to open.

For the past 30 years, thousands of Framingham teenagers have had brief stays at Harbinger House while their family issues were stabilized. Further, numerous other new teen shelters have opened in Massachusetts by relying upon the Harbinger House case to avoid court battles themselves.

Today, we at Wayside are again fighting on behalf of our children. We have sued the town because we must; the rights of these children and families and future generations of children and families must be upheld by Wayside and its Board of Directors. We must; it is our duty. Again.

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