

Lawsuit claims Grand Prairie apartments fail accessibility standards

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What's this?

PEORIA — National fair-housing advocates allege the Apartments at Grand Prairie fail to meet federal standards for accessibility by those in wheelchairs.

A lawsuit filed last week in U.S. District Court in Indianapolis states the complex at 5400 W. Sienna Lane in Peoria doesn't comply with the Fair Housing Act.

The clubhouse's bathrooms and kitchens are too narrow for people in wheelchairs, the suit alleges, and the parking spaces lack cement dividers that prevent vehicles from pulling too close to a sidewalk, thus inhibiting use. There also are issues with the actual apartments, according to the suit.

Named in the suit are Buckingham Realty and Development Corp. and Buckingham Management LLC, as well as Grand Prairie Apartments LLC, which oversees the Far North Peoria complex. Also named are corporations linked to an apartment complex in Kentucky and two in Indiana.

All four complexes were built or designed by Buckingham.

A search of the Illinois secretary of state's website listed Peoria-based Cullinan Properties Ltd. as one of the managers of Grand Prairie Apartments LLC.

"The Apartments at Grand Prairie were constructed to comply with the Fair Housing Act and all applicable state and federal codes," Scott Bishop, director of property management and medical/office leasing for Cullinan, said in a statement.

The Americans with Disabilities Act covers public buildings. But the FHA, which went into effect in 1991, covers apartment complexes such as Grand Prairie.

Buckingham appears to manage the site, based upon information from the complex's website. Anne Houghtaling of Wheaton-based HOPE Fair Housing Center said Buckingham's name was on the initial plans and on the permits the city of Peoria issued.

Houghtaling's group joined the Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana and National Fair Housing Alliance in filing the suit. She said the suit wasn't driven by a complaint but by a systemic look at

Buckingham's properties.

The suit asks a judge to order the company to correct the violations and require Buckingham to comply at all its locations. Houghtaling said the problem is, there is no requirement for a city, such as Peoria, to check for FHA compliance.

"So a developer can come in and say, 'Yes, the city passed it,' but that doesn't mean that it has been reviewed by FHA compliance," she said.

Morgan Williams of the National Fair Housing Alliance said that taken in totality, the violations are significant.

"We have found that in the multifamily housing industry, that after more than 20 years of the effective date of the FHA accessibility requirements, builders are continuing to build apartments that effectively bar people from the premises," he said.

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