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## **Board says backyard shelter for ill woman must go**

**South Whitehall resident has multiple chemical sensitivity.**

By Randy Kraft Of The Morning Call

Trying to protect his wife from life-threatening allergies caused Craig Bowes to make a big mistake, one that antagonized his neighbors and has gotten him into trouble with South Whitehall Township.

Elizabeth Feudale, his wife, suffers severely from environmental illness, also known as multiple chemical sensitivity.

The couple no longer can afford for her to stay in specially designed housing free of chemicals, molds and pollens in Texas. And they are tired of being kept apart for years by her illness.

So Bowes installed a special modular housing unit in their backyard at 1531 N. 19th St.

But, based on a neighbor's complaint, the township ordered him in late January to stop work on the trailer-like unit, which the couple has named "the bubble."

Bowes' zoning appeal was denied last week. After receiving its written decision, he will have 90 days to remove the structure, which contains a bedroom and a bathroom.

"They've pretty much given me a death sentence," Feudale said. "I've got nowhere to go."

The 17,000-pound unit has filtered air and water. "It's the poor man's equivalent of a hospital clean room" Bowes said. He paid \$10,500 for it, plus \$5,000 in shipping from Texas.

"Do we want this?" Bowes said. "Absolutely not. I don't want my wife living in a box in the backyard. Do we need it? Absolutely. We need this desperately. This is a life and death situation."

The couple hope eventually she can live in the all-metal, pre-fabricated Lustron Corp. home they purchased a year ago. The small pale yellow dwelling is at the northeast corner of 19th and Stanley streets, a couple of blocks north of Allentown. Built in 1949, it is one of the few Lustron homes remaining in the Lehigh Valley. More than 2,500 were produced.

But after buying the house, they realized it needs much work. Residue from decades of human occupancy -- rat poison in a closet, petroleum build-up in a

closed ceiling space from a long-gone oil heater, the odor of cigarette smoke - - makes it uninhabitable for Feudale. "We don't know if we can make this house safe," she said.

While Bowes has built a water filtration system for the house, it still needs a \$3,000 air filtration system.

"Craig had to get a safe space where I could survive," Feudale said. "If I had come home from Texas to this house, I would not have lasted two weeks." She does go inside, but "it dings me, it fills me up with chemicals. I need to go back to the bubble. I could not sleep in this house."

"I've basically become allergic to the world, pollen as well as mold and chemicals," Feudale said. "My immune system doesn't work."

Headaches, vertigo, stomach pain and irritable bowel syndrome are just a few of her symptoms. Her throat also can close. She gives herself allergy shots up to three times a day and goes on oxygen every day.

She said: "Some people say to me, 'How do you do it?' I say: 'What choice do I have?' "

Because of medical bills, the couple is hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt, said Feudale. They cannot afford a custom-built home that is totally chemical-free.

Bowes said he didn't realize he needed township approval to put the unit in the backyard. "It was stupid of me not to check with the laws around here. But there should be a medical exception for this."

He said the Zoning Hearing Board would not allow him to read a letter from his wife's doctor, William Rea, who has been treating her since 2003.

"This patient's prognosis is guarded at this time," wrote Rea. "It is my medical opinion that this living structure is the only way to protect Ms. Feudale from an exacerbation of her symptoms and a worsening of her already unstable condition. – Safe, chemical-free housing is imperative to her recovery."

The Dallas-based doctor designed the steel and porcelain unit. He wrote it has been used successfully for many patients over two decades.

The issue before the hearing board involved proper use of the property, not Feudale's health, township manager Gerald Gasda said. "It's building in the wrong place in the wrong way."

Gasda said two dozen neighbors attended the zoning meeting to object to Bowe's appeal, but none spoke in favor of it. "Everyone there, including the objectors, was very sympathetic to his wife's medical condition. But he made no effort to comply with our codes. He did everything without permits."

Gasda said the couple can appeal the board's decision to Lehigh County Court, adding a court decision could take six months to a year. If Bowes does nothing after 90 days, "he's fair game for prosecution," Gasda said. "That's not to say we're going to do that. We'll evaluate that on day 91."

"We're investigating several options," said Michael Lessa, the lawyer who represented Bowes and Feudale, ranging from compliance to, only if necessary, a court appeal. "We do want to cooperate and work with the township."

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