

Owners can begin Peachtree and Pine shelter eviction process

A judge has ruled the group that holds the title on the building at Peachtree and Pine Streets in Midtown Atlanta where hundreds of men, women and children bed down nightly can start the court process to evict the Task Force for the Homeless because it had not made a payment in years.

Fulton Superior Court Judge Craig Schwall said in an order Friday that the removal process could begin, but his order did not say that eviction was imminent or even certain.

The matter of whether the shelter can continue to operate is far from resolved. For years, the Task Force for the Homeless — led by Anita Beatty — has been at war with the city, Central Atlanta Progress and some of the business community because hundreds of homeless mill around and sometimes spill over into neighboring properties, vandalize and break into cars, businesses and homes nearby.

Beatty has accused city officials and CAP of a campaign to cut off donations because they want the homeless out of sight. Once the large donors were dissuaded from helping the Task Force, it became impossible for the charity to pay its bills, including hundreds of thousands of dollars it owed the city for water, she said.

The Task Force claims donations that once totaled as much as \$1.7 million a year dropped to around \$200,000, because the Atlanta business community had poisoned its reputation with donors.

Without the Peachtree-Pine shelter, Beatty says, the homeless she serves will have nowhere to go.

As many as 650 men, women and children sleep at the shelter each night but there are far more when the weather is bad or it's cold.

Over the years of the dispute, opponents of the shelter have insisted that no one will be left with nowhere to go if the Peachtree-Pine Shelter is closed.

Richard Robbins, the attorney for Ichthus Community Trust, said the lender planned to “pursue dispossessory like any other owner in the state. If they (Task Force for the Homeless) want to fight it, they can fight it. However, they have to pay rent in the meantime.

“This is not kicking out the homeless,” Robbins said. “It will be evicting the Task force. If the Task Force is evicted, we will transition the homeless to other shelters. If they don't pay rent, they have to leave and we'll bring in someone else to run the shelter.”

Attorney Steven Hall, who represents the Task Force, said the charity will resist eviction efforts.

“We have been fighting for years over the manner in which title was obtained and a foreclosure was conducted,” Hall said. “We’re hoping this will mean the court will hear all issues at one time and we will get a final answer.”

The Task Force for the Homeless got into financial straits after it borrowed \$900,000 in 1997 to make repairs on the building that it owned at the time. Ichthus bought the note in 2010 for just over \$781,000 and soon began the removal process, which stopped, started and then stopped again because of legal issues.