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By [Steve Doyle](#)

James Henderson speaks on Madison Street.JPG

James Henderson, executive director of the Christian Coalition of Alabama, speaks during a July 1 memorial service to mark the closing of Alabama Women's Center for Reproductive Alternatives on Madison Street. (Bob Gathany | bgathany@al.com)

(Bob Gathany)

[HUNTSVILLE, Alabama](#) – Anti-abortion activists are accusing Huntsville officials of being too quick to assist a [shuttered downtown abortion clinic](#) that is trying to re-open in a different location.

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James Henderson, executive director of the Christian Coalition of Alabama, said the city recently ruled that Alabama Women's Center for Reproductive Alternatives' [proposed new address at 4831 Sparkman Drive](#) complies with local zoning laws.

Henderson and attorneys from the California-based Life Legal Defense Foundation disagree, arguing that the city is relying on a 1998 medical use variance that allowed Huntsville Hospital to open an outpatient clinic in a residential area. The variance should have expired when the outpatient facility closed, said Henderson.

The building is now owned by Alabama Women's Center.

"We have a valid appeal," Henderson told AL.com Tuesday. "But I believe there's been some home cooking, and the deck is stacked against us."

Huntsville Manager of Planning Services Jim McGuffey said the former Huntsville Hospital facility and Alabama Women's Center are both medical clinics, so the use of the building has not changed.

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"That's my interpretation," McGuffey said Tuesday. "Mr. Henderson obviously

feels otherwise."

Henderson did not provide the necessary paperwork to have his appeal heard at tonight's Board of Zoning Adjustment meeting, said McGuffey, but can ask to be added to the August meeting agenda.

Abortion opponents plan to show their disapproval by holding a prayer vigil and news conference outside Huntsville City Hall this afternoon.

Alabama Women's Center bought the office building on Sparkman Drive when its former location on Madison Street could not be retrofitted to comply with the new [Alabama Women's Health and Safety Act](#). The controversial law requires abortion clinics to meet the same building standards as ambulatory surgical centers, including doors and hallways wide enough to accommodate ambulance gurneys.

Alabama Women's Center [surrendered its abortion provider license](#) in late June but is seeking the state Department of Public Health's OK to re-open on Sparkman Drive.

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Henderson said his side "caught" the clinic remodeling the building before getting the necessary city permits. Abortion opponents are prepared to file "multiple appeals" over Huntsville granting the clinic a building permit after work had already begun, he said.

"The city is losing credibility with the public because they're not playing fair," said Henderson.

McGuffey said the city issued a stop-work order after learning that a contractor was resurfacing concrete and adding a wheelchair ramp at the proposed clinic site. The contractor told city officials he didn't realize he needed a permit for minor renovations, said McGuffey.

The contractor filled out the necessary paperwork and was issued a city building permit last week, he said.

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