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UrbanPromise seeks OK to redo 'Extreme' home

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The "Extreme Makeover" house here could soon get another makeover.

UrbanPromise, the Camden-based ministry that owns the landmark home, wants township approval to use the 3,000-square-foot building as a retreat center and meeting place.

The ministry also hopes to maintain guest quarters in the four-bedroom home, which was built in a single week in 2007 as part of a TV show.

The changes would benefit both visitors and volunteers at UrbanPromise, said Steve Tuttle, the ministry's director of operations.

"We have a number of people who come here from across the country and from other countries so they can look at the UrbanPromise model," he said. "They take what they've learned here and bring it to their communities."

He said the home also could provide lodging for interns and volunteers -- some from as far away as Africa -- who currently live in rental properties scattered throughout Camden.

"This would be much more convenient," he observed. "They'd be right here on our campus."

Pennsauken's zoning board is to hear the ministry's request on Aug. 4. A variance is needed because the desired uses are not allowed under the current residential zoning.

Thousands of volunteers helped erect the imposing house at 3601 Federal Street for a disabled Camden man, Victor Marrero, and his five teenage sons.

The ABC-TV show, "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," chose the Marreros for the windfall after they were featured in a network documentary on the difficulties of daily life in Camden.

But the large house, with annual property taxes of \$6,050, proved to be a financial burden. Victor Marrero briefly listed it for sale in May 2008, then sold it to UrbanPromise for \$275,000 in July 2009.

"We definitely wanted to help out Victor and his family," said Tuttle, who noted Marrero has since left the state.

But he noted the property originally was part of UrbanPromise's campus. The ministry sold it for \$1 to Marrero, an UrbanPromise volunteer, in July 2007 because "Extreme Makeover" requires that its participants be homeowners.

The property currently houses a couple who serve as its caretakers, Tuttle said.

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