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Drug rehabilitation clinic awaits zoning decision

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Hopes for a local branch of a St. Petersburg drug rehabilitation program have become strained as local parents must wait for zoning clearance.

Straight, Inc. announced plans in May to open a second program Aug. 1. Sarasota was chosen as the location and officials from the rehabilitation center were on the

lookout for a new home. Two locations are being eyed: one on Cattleman Road near the county administration offices and another at McIntosh and Clark roads — for a facility which could eventually serve 200 or more adolescent drug abusers.

But the August opening date is likely to pass and so may the revised, Sept. 1 target date as the non-profit organization seeks the ap-

proval of the Sarasota County Planning Commission and the Sarasota County Commission.

Straight parent Ed Schwartz of Sarasota said either site will require an amendment to current zoning laws because they are zoned for industrial use. Straight's intention would be to use a warehouse building as a rehabilitation clinic.

If the zoning department and the county commissioners agree to

allow rehabilitation clinics in industrial areas, Straight would also need to apply for a special exception on its specific piece of property. According to assistant director of planning, Chuck Place, the legal process could push the official review and a public hearing on the land use into August.

Schwartz would like to shorten the waiting time by presenting

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Drug problem

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county officials with the zoning law amendment and the request for a special exception simultaneously, but county officials say this cannot be done.

"We're eventually going to have a **Straight** program in Sarasota, whether it's September or November," said Schwartz, who is in charge of the Sarasota site selection. "It's too important to the Sarasota people who have kids in the St. Pete program right now and

too important to the people of Sarasota County overall."

As many as 100 youths enrolled in the St. Petersburg program travel from the Sarasota-Manatee area and would be the core of the new program when it opens its doors. Local parents currently find the two-hour round trip drive to Pinellas County tedious although their participation is required.

Jim Hartz, executive director of **Straight**, looks forward to the Sarasota branch and is already

beginning to line up personnel. Bill Holloway, an ROTC instructor at Sarasota High last year, is expected to play a major role in the local program.

Straight will be Sarasota's second adolescent drug rehabilitation program to open within the past year. Last month, LIFE opened its doors in the south county to serve teens from Bradenton to Fort Myers in response to the growing problem of teen-age drug abuse.