

## Ex-drug clinic clients may protest church

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Self-described "survivors" of the controversial Straight drug treatment are expected to protest Monday a local resident's request for a special exception to establish a church here.

In the center of the controversy is Miller Newton, former national clinical director for Straight. Newton's Church at the Sea Foundation hopes to get city approval for creating a private chapel in a home that is used by members of the Orthodox Church of Antioch. Miller is a Madeira Beach resident and a priest in the church.

One of the Straight "survivors" has presented the city with a several-inches-thick binder containing material about Newton, his association with Straight as well as another drug treatment program in New Jersey, and lawsuits filed against the programs.

In 2000, Newton's New Jersey program and affiliated psychiatrists settled a \$4.5-million suit filed by a former client. An additional \$6.5-million was awarded to former clients in 2003.

Paula Cohen, the city's director of community development, said the city does not intend to put the materials into evidence at Monday's hearing.

"It will be up to the city attorney and the special master to decide if they are relevant to the case," she said Friday, stressing that the hearing is to decide only the merits of the proposed zoning change.

Cohen said the city has informed Special Master Herbert Langford Jr. that a "large group of people" may attend and want to speak at the hearing. "We told him that he has discretion to ask for representatives to speak rather than everyone that will be there," she said.

Among those expected to attend are more than 40 residents who have signed a petition protesting the proposed church at 13280 Fourth St. E. The residents cite Newton's history with the drug treatment programs, and argue that the proposed chapel would disrupt their neighborhood and depress property values.

"We who have signed the petitions and written letters have nothing against any religion," says resident Marsha Loper, who charges that Miller "blatantly lied" on his original permit application to build a recreation room at the subject property. That room is to be the site of the proposed chapel.

"His personal background is terrible. This is a residential area. We don't need others doing as they please, when and how they please and lying," wrote Loper in a letter to the city.

Miller has proposed limiting the use of the chapel, including restrictions against regular public activities on the site.

The issue will be decided during a formal zoning hearing Monday at 7 p.m. at City Hall.

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