

Oct. 24, 2007

Sarasota County reaches settlement with Tammi House

The Sarasota County Commission today approved settlement agreements in the lawsuits brought by Renaissance Manor, Inc., Coastal Behavioral Healthcare, Inc. and the U.S. Department of Justice. The settlement is beneficial for the citizens of Sarasota County because it preserves and protects the county's zoning program while at the same time providing a clear commitment to continued support of sober housing and programs for citizens recovering from drug and alcohol addiction.

"The county is committed to advancing efforts to help those in recovery from substance abuse and alcohol addiction, and providing housing for those in need," said Susan Scott, deputy county administrator. These settlement agreements demonstrate that continued commitment, as well as avoiding what was likely to be a lengthy and expensive trial."

In the settlement agreement with Renaissance Manor and Coastal Behavioral, those parties have agreed to cease all current operations of the Tammi Houses as a single facility for recovering drug addicts and alcoholics. Instead of operating six houses as one unit, each of the Sevilla Street Houses will be independent of one another and will be used for residential purposes only. Going forward, Renaissance Manor will serve as a lessor or leasing agent only and will no longer provide services on-site to the residents of the houses. There will be no drug testing, no dispensing of medication, and no patient services by Coastal Behavioral Healthcare on-site.

In the settlement agreement with DOJ, the county agreed to update its procedures for handling requests for reasonable accommodation, provide additional training regarding the Fair Housing Act, and specifically designate a Fair Housing Compliance Officer.

Consistent with its long-standing commitment to persons with disabilities, the county agreed to contribute \$750,000 to Renaissance Manor and Coastal Behavioral to benefit persons in recovery from substance abuse and alcohol addiction and persons with mental illness and also agreed to contribute \$10,000 to the United States for the benefit of the public interest.

These settlement agreements coincide with the county's commitment to sober housing and programs for citizens recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. Over the past 10 years, Sarasota County has partnered with providers and contributed nearly \$3 million for sober and mental health housing and over \$20 million for programs.

"The resolution of this lawsuit provides residents with assurances that zoning codes intended to create and preserve a residential character of neighborhoods are legitimate and enforceable," said County Administrator Jim Ley, "while continuing our commitment to meeting the needs of all of our citizens, including those recovering from substance abuse or alcohol addiction who are in need of housing assistance."