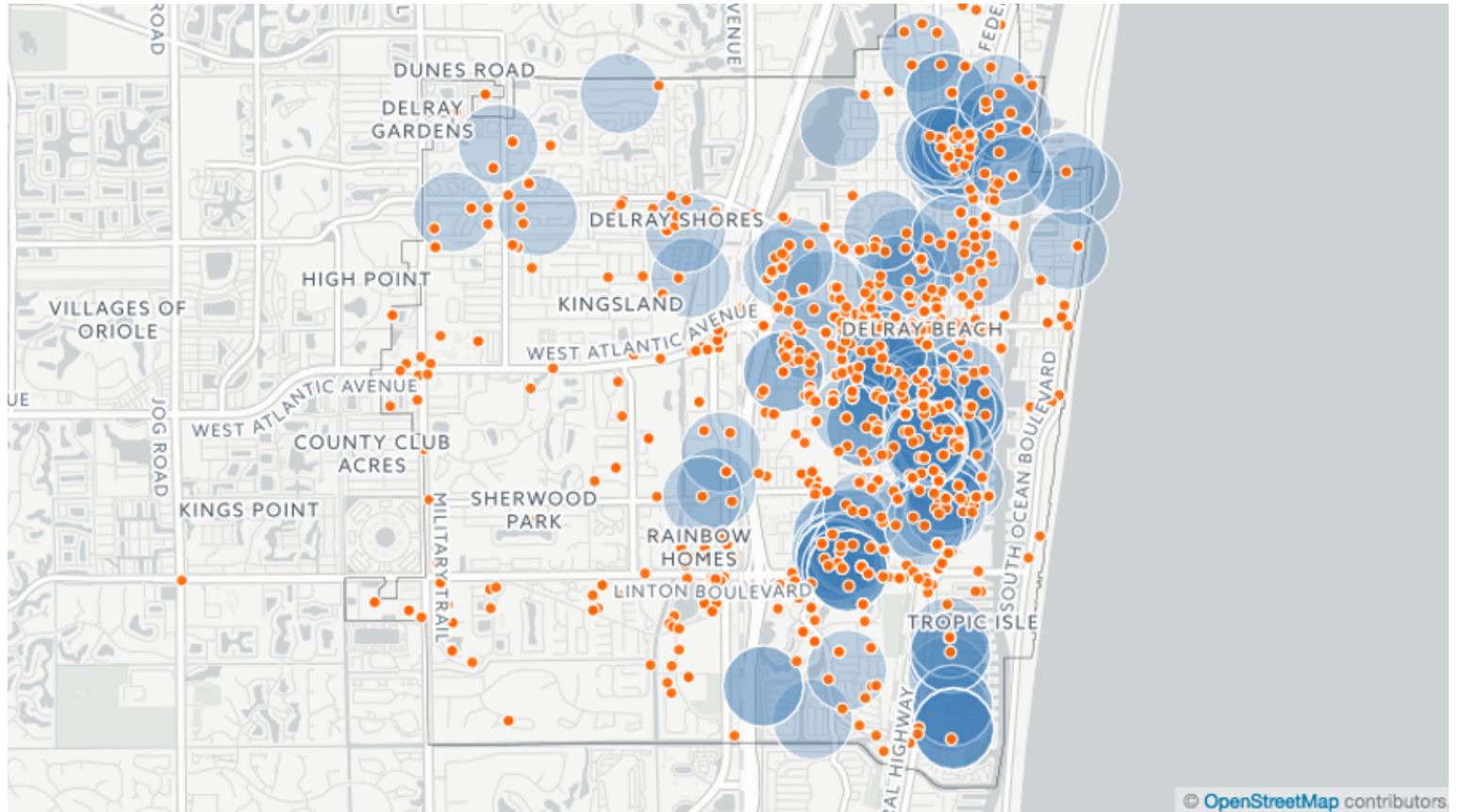


# Delray and Boynton approve rules to regulate sober homes



For the first time in Florida, the Sun Sentinel analyzed how frequently overdoses occurred near sober homes in one South Florida city.

By **Brooke Baitinger and Ryan Van Velzer**

Sun Sentinel

JULY 18, 2017, 10:50 PM

**D**elray Beach and Boynton Beach are ready to regulate sober homes and other types of community housing in response to the opioid crisis gripping South Florida and the rest of the country.

Delray and Boynton on Tuesday night unanimously approved new rules for group homes. Both cities will require group homes to be licensed through a regulatory entity such as the Florida Association of Recovery Residences, a **Boca Raton**-based organization.

Sober homes, also known as recovery residences or halfway houses, shelter people recovering from alcohol

or drug addiction. The new regulations aim to enact a regulatory system meant to help preserve the character of neighborhoods.

A **Sun Sentinel investigation** found hundreds of people in Delray Beach are overdosing on drugs just beyond the group homes that are supposed to help them recover. The vast majority of overdoses in Delray happen in neighborhoods where sober homes are concentrated, predominantly on the city's east side.

Some homes and treatment centers in South Florida, run by unscrupulous operators, have come under fire **for luring people from** other regions of the country with cash, gift cards and discounted rents, primarily to **collect on their insurance policies**, authorities say.

Many people wind up on the streets, returning to drug use, according to a **report commissioned in Palm Beach County**.

Paramedics handled 5,000 overdose calls in Palm Beach County last year. In Broward County, opioids killed 582 people last year.

Delray's new law would affect most community residences, including sober homes and other group homes for people with disabilities. Under the ordinance, each new community residence of four or more people should be at least 660 feet — about one city block — from one another. To move closer, they would need a city-issued permit.

The rule would apply only to new community residences and would not be imposed on existing ones.

“This legislation will save lives in this community,” said Delray Beach Mayor Cary Glickstein.

The city will have to consider adding the necessary funding in upcoming budget cycles to enforce the ordinance, he said.

“While this is broadly based and broadly applied, we are not going to be able to implement with current staff,” he said.

It also would require all community residences to have a license, certification or accreditation from a regulatory body like the Florida Association of Recovery Residences. If one isn't available, the community residence could again seek a permit from the city.

The ordinance is based on **findings from a zoning study** commissioned by the city to learn more about the impacts of community residences on Delray Beach.

“This is not a silver bullet, there is a lot more that we have to do and can do,” said Commissioner Jim Chard.

Al Johnson, Chief Assistant State Attorney for Palm Beach County, supported the city’s new rules.

“I think the city went about it in a compassionate and thoughtful way,” Johnson said. “They’ve come up with the right idea — the protection of residents as opposed to banning group homes that house people with disabilities.”

Boynton city officials drafted new rules during a six-month moratorium that temporarily halted processing for new group-home applications, which ended on June 4.

Boynton officials approved the new rules unanimously in an hourslong meeting Tuesday night. Many residents at the meeting voiced their concerns, including Neill Timmons, owner and operator of Arch to Freedom, a Boynton sober home.

Timmons applauded officials for rules that he said were reasonable.

“I was so terrified you were going to shut down every sober home on every block and I was going to have to go work at Denny’s or something,” he said. “I’ve been doing this for a little over four years. It’s my passion.”

He responded to complaints from other residents and said that oversight will help.

Starting Wednesday, new sober homes in Boynton Beach that open up will have to register with Florida Association of Recovery Residences.

The new rules also include increasing parking requirements, preventing frontyards from being paved to accommodate more cars per home, and increasing the maximum number of residents in the homes from six to 10.

Boynton officials initially proposed a distance separation standard of 300 feet between all group homes, but decided to omit the rule because it is a weak point in the proposed standards due to a potentially arbitrary method of setting distance. It wasn’t supported legally, officials said.

In related business, Delray Commissioners **on Tuesday night unanimously chose** to take the next step in plans to sue drug manufacturers.

The city will enter into negotiations with San Diego-based law firm Robbins Geller Rudman & Dowd, which wrote a memo to city commissioners saying it could use Florida’s consumer protection laws to argue drug

manufacturers misled the public and omitted facts through their marketing.

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