

City of
Bellevue



East Bellevue Community Council

Post Office Box 90012 Bellevue, Washington 98009

DATE: October 16, 2017
TO: Mayor Stokes and City Councilmembers
FROM: East Bellevue Community Council
SUBJECT: Report from East Bellevue Community Council

Dear Mayor Stokes and Members of the City Council,

The EBCC strongly supports the ordinance to temporarily ban needle exchange sites in Bellevue. We would even support a 2-3 year ban.

However, we are concerned and believe it is poor public policy to implement a permanent ban without much more study.

We already have a heroin problem in Bellevue. Starbucks employees see dirty needles in their toilets. I know because my daughter worked for Starbucks. There is at least one store that has installed a dirty needle container. When these users get ill they are treated by our local medical system generally with no insurance for HIV, infections, liver problems and the like. So there is already an economic cost to Bellevue.

King County did not come up with the idea of clean needle exchanges overnight. I understand they had a group of experts study the whole issue. So to dismiss their recommendations out of hand does not seem a good policy for Bellevue. Perhaps they could be presented to the public before a decision is made.

What if other ideas are presented in the future but the ban excludes their consideration? Suppose we were to set up programs at hospitals and intermediate care clinics with staff to encourage users to get treatment AND make sure they had clean needles. Suppose we had mobile vehicles at scheduled locations to offer counseling and clean needles. These are just a couple of thoughts that couldn't be implemented with this ban.

Of course, there is no program that will eliminate people using drugs. This has been a problem since Roman times. But contrary to local comments by politicians, these needle programs have not been failures in other countries. Despite problems, all academic studies

show a positive outcome in Vancouver BC for instance. And I am sure they would have dropped the program which has been in place for 30 years if it were not somewhat successful. The same could be said for Switzerland and France.

We recognize this is a serious problem and nobody wants heroin or any other illegal drugs on our streets. But they are. They are in our high schools today. To permanently ban a program that we might want to reconsider in some form in the future seems poor public policy. As with all good intentions there will be unintended consequences in the future I fear.

Gerry Hughes
Councilmember, EBCC