

Program

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van would be around late March. On March 25, Lubrano visited the Redondo Heights Park and Ride where the van would be available for exchanges.

Lubrano watched people come and go from the van, then walked up to the van herself. She told the worker she didn't have a needle to exchange, said she wasn't sure which needle she needed as someone else usually injects her arm, and that she uses heroin. Lubrano claims staff said it wasn't a problem and handed her a box of 100 clean syringes.

"No, never in my lifetime," Lubrano told the Mirror when asked if she uses heroin.

Lubrano said she was left shocked and speechless at the amount of syringes provided to her.

"The public health department is creating a public health crisis here by giving out these needles," she said.

The next day, March 26, Lubrano visited the SCORE van at the 348th Street and 9th Avenue Park and Ride in Federal Way where she had scheduled another appointment.

This time she didn't approach the van "since I already had that experience," but recalled seeing similar sights: people

coming and going, getting needles and walking to the edge of the parking lot to inject drugs.

"I had to get pictures, I had to say this was my personal experience because, you know, my personal experience can't be refuted," she said.

Lubrano said the program is unconscionable, unfair and unsafe for those living in the community and for those tasked to clean up community sites where needles have been dumped, such as city or county maintenance workers.

The two Park and Ride locations she visited are King County Metro properties and are not owned by the City of Federal Way.

On March 28, Lubrano posted her findings to a private Facebook group and members demanded responses from local elected officials.

Replacement services lacking

The city does not support any of the "convoluted logic" the county health board has about giving out needles, said Steve McNey, communications and government affairs coordinator for the city.

"The City of Federal Way does not support this program — we do not like it," McNey said. "The City of Federal Way does not consent to this ... Seattle & King County Board of

Public Health is giving us no advance warning that they're coming and we're not told about this in any way."

Mayor Jim Ferrell said the city questioned public health officials about the program several times since they were made aware of a needle exchange program in Federal Way in late Dec. 2020. City officials reached out to public health, who stated the program did not visit grocery stores or businesses in Federal Way.

With the public health van seen just days ago, the mayor said he had to balance his responsiveness about the issue with accountability and thoughtfulness for the community members.

On March 29, Ferrell announced he will present a resolution at the April 6 city council meeting to oppose needle exchange programs in Federal Way. This resolution is a direct ask of public health to cease services in Federal Way.

The resolution, in part, states the city does not support the distribution of drug paraphernalia and hypodermic needles in parking lots and public spaces with no clear emphasis on exchanges or referrals and calls upon public health, or any other organization providing needles, to stop services in Federal Way until they can be conducted in a "manner that is mindful of the concerns of the



OLIVIA SULLIVAN/SOUND PUBLISHING
Needles littered the ground throughout a homeless encampment in 2019 at Federal Way's Hylebos Wetlands, which is public property.

people of Federal Way and in a manner calculated to reduce needle proliferation and encourage rehabilitation."

According to Ferrell, Public Health — Seattle & King County Director Patty Hayes agreed to suspend the needle exchange program services in Federal Way for the next several months on March 30. Public health confirmed the discussion on pausing services during a short period to allow for further conversations and education.

The city remains focused on how to best serve and assist the people in the community, but "giving out needles is not the way to do so," Ferrell said. In 2017, Federal Way outlawed safe injection sites within city limits.

When asked what services the city will provide or introduce to replace the needle exchange program now suspended, Ferrell said the city and the county will take the next several months to craft a more collaborative plan for services to assist individuals struggling with addiction.

In the meantime, Ferrell said he encourages drug

users who previously relied on the needle exchange program to "get into treatment"

However, South King County does not have enough drug treatment resources and facilities for individuals with drug addictions, said Susan Honda, Federal Way City Council president and vice chair of the King County Board of Health.

If the SCORE program is not acting as a trust-building process, then it "needs to be revamped," she said.

The program has been in place for over 10 years. The resident's recent events are not reflective of the true needle exchange program and its aims to help the community, Honda said.

Honda said she understands the complexities of a drug addiction crisis, but the city officials and staff members need to immediately get to work on putting service options in place before taking away a program.

"I don't know stopping the needle exchange [program] will stop the problem in Federal Way," she said. "But we need solutions and we need to start now."

Planning for the future

With the suspension of the services, questions remain. How will drug users who rely on the exchange program obtain clean needles? Will the city see an uptick in illnesses or deaths among community members with drug addictions? Will drug users seek services in Auburn or Des Moines or Tacoma instead of Federal Way?

In order to address the lingering questions and plan for future services, Mayor Jim Ferrell said he will appoint a working group of residents and experts in the subject matter to guide upcoming services that connect scientific data, public health policy and community input.

The idea for a working group came from Honda, who will also be a co-chair. Those interested in serving on the working group are encouraged to email Ferrell at jim.ferrell@cityoffederalway.com. More information about the group will be presented at the Federal Way City Council meeting Tuesday, April 6.

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Seattle – King County Board of Health

As there have been a number of recent questions to my office about actions by the Board of Health, I wanted to remind everyone that it is the Seattle – King County Board of Health that sets county-wide public health policy, enacts and enforces local public health regulations, and carries out other duties of local boards of health as specified in state law. I am not a member of the Board of Health.

The Board is composed of 10 voting members and 1 nonvoting member. 8 of the 10 voting members are elected officials – 3 from the Metropolitan King County, 3 from the Seattle City Council, and 2 from the Suburban Cities of King County. The two remaining voting members are health professionals selected by other members of the Board. A third health professional serves as the nonvoting member.

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