

Methadone clinic debate looms again

Don't change zoning rules, report says

BY KIM GUTTORMSON, CALGARY HERALD FEBRUARY 13, 2010

Methadone clinics -- an issue last year when a number of neighbourhoods fought against becoming home to one -- don't need a separate land use designation, says a report going to a civic committee.

The clinics -- which supply methadone to people addicted to opioids, such as painkillers -- should remain under the medical clinic designation when determining where they can be located because they provide a health service, states the report, which will be discussed at Wednesday's land use, planning and transportation committee meeting.

"It's very clear it fits under a medical clinic use," said Ald. Brian Pincott, who asked for the report after one of his communities objected to the Second Chance clinic moving in.

Second Chance eventually found a home in the Foothills industrial park, after residents in Braeside fought against it moving into a former medical clinic space, even though the methadone is dispensed off-site.

Before that, it lost its lease on a building in downtown Calgary and was then forced from a spot in a northeast industrial park because it wasn't zoned for medical clinics.

Pincott said the clinic operated in Braeside for six months with no problems, showing that better education is needed so neighbours can understand what takes place and who the patients are.

The report says, according to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the large majority of methadone patients in Calgary are addicted to legal prescription drugs, not illegal.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart says the report's conclusion isn't going to satisfy concerned community members.

"I don't know what the answer is, but this report doesn't provide any answers," she said. "The community views them as different than medical clinics."

The report says that giving methadone clinics a special designation would require legitimate planning considerations, or "it would open itself up to potential challenges in terms of discrimination. It also raises the potential of attempting to regulate the user, rather than the use, by identifying the methadone patients as being different from other types of medical patients."

It does recommend using good neighbour agreements, which see the facility and surrounding committee work together to reach better understanding of concerns.

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