

Calgary aldermen want zoning changed for city clinic

BY KIM GUTTORMSON, CALGARY HERALD JULY 27, 2009 7:55 AM

CALGARY - A methadone clinic struggling to find a permanent home is still searching for a new location, as city council today will debate ways to make that search easier.

Second Chance Recovery, which is temporarily operating in a Braeside strip mall, has had difficulty finding a place to operate after neighbourhood concerns forced it from an industrial area in Highland Park, and there were vocal protests to it opening in its current location.

After an angry public meeting in Braeside earlier this month, Second Chance said it would leave the city, but reconsidered after what it called an outpouring of support.

Hugh Ham, lawyer for the clinic, said it hasn't yet found a new home, and is still trying to meet with the province, which has said it will help.

The only other methadone clinic in Calgary is operated by Alberta Health Services at the Sheldon Chumir Centre.

Today, Ald. Brian Pincott and Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart will ask their colleagues to consider changes to the city's zoning bylaws, including whether the clinics should have their own criteria and whether they should be allowed in industrial areas, which they are now excluded from.

"I think we can have to look at how we can do this better," said Pincott, who tried to facilitate discussions between the Braeside community and the clinic.

"Sadly, we need methadone clinics. How can we make sure we site them appropriately and make sure the communities are informed and make sure the clinics themselves are aware of community concerns and address them?"

"What we saw with the methadone clinic trying to go into Braeside was a failure of the entire system."

The clinic's location in Braeside is an allowed use, since it is a medical clinic in a spot where medical clinics are allowed, but neighbours were unhappy. Its previous location in Highland Park wasn't an allowed use, because of the way industrial sites are zoned. Neighbours there were also not pleased.

Ald. Bob Hawkesworth, who was involved in the Highland Park discussions, said looking at the zoning is a good idea.

But he said it wouldn't have solved the issue in his ward, because residents were concerned about the concentration of addiction centres, with a new treatment facility already being built in the

neighbourhood.

He also believes Alberta Health Services has to take more of a leadership role and ensure its addictions strategy includes the clinics --which provide counselling and a daily dose of methadone to clients trying to beat addictions to heroin, morphine and some prescription painkillers.

"For Calgary to try to address this solely as a land use issue is going to be futile," he said.

Pincott said the clinics are vital and providing information to communities about how they operate and who its clientele is should dispel much of the concern.

"It's engagement before the fact rather than after the fact," he said, adding that good neighbour agreements should also be part of any allowed methadone clinic, so communities know what they can expect. "Let's get the real information and facts out on the table first."

Second Chance has about 500 clients using its Calgary clinic, and also has three locations in Edmonton, as well as one each in Red Deer, Medicine Hat and Lethbridge.

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