

To: City Council
From: Debbie Laurie
Date: March 21, 2024
RE: CDC Approved Mobile Syringe Service Program (SSP) Sites

On December 1st, I met with a representative of Needlepoint Sanctuary who indicated they intended to submit an application to become a mobile syringe provider. During that meeting, I never attempted to dissuade the application but I did share our preference that the locations not be in Pierce Park or Pickering Square. The City has been, and will continue to, support harm reduction strategies within our community. As a City, we devote significant resources to support harm reduction not only within our community but regionally as well through a variety of Public Health programs and initiatives, including serving as the point of distribution of Narcan across five counties.

On March 1st, staff became aware that the Maine CDC approved Needlepoint Sanctuary's application to operate three mobile syringe service program outreach locations in Bangor, including the following locations; intersection of Texas Avenue and University Way, 100 Broad Street, alongside Broad Street Park (Pickering Square), and 125 Harlow Street (Pierce Park).

As part of the State's application process, SSPs are required to provide notice to the municipalities of their intent to file, but that notice does not include proposed locations. Applications are reviewed by the Syringe Service Program Certification Review Team and recommended for action to the Director of the CDC, who has ten days to issue a final decision. As the locations identified are public property, the City was not contacted or consulted as to whether or not the identified locations would be appropriate within our community.

Council Chair Pelletier and I met with representatives from the CDC on March 8th and March 15th. We had requested that alternate locations be utilized for the service and shared that the alternatives proposed by the provider were not acceptable either: Abbott Square and Waterfront. We have provided potential alternative sites (private property) that the CDC is committed to follow up on promptly.

Ensuring equitable access to our public spaces has been a sentiment shared by our residents, visitors, businesses and members of the City Council. While an SSP does not result in syringe waste per se, as a community the amount of syringe waste within our public spaces presents a public health risk to all.

As more and more community members have become aware of the recent CDC action, they have expressed significant concerns for the actions taken by the State on this application. As we continue our discussions with the CDC, we wanted to schedule this workshop to provide an opportunity for the City Council, as a body, to discuss for further direction.