



City of Winston-Salem City Council Council Agenda Item Summary

Title	Information Item on Zoning Regulations for Needle Exchanges
City Council Committee	General Government Committee
Staff Lead (Presenter)	Aaron King, ACM
City Manager/ACM	Aaron King, ACM

Agenda Item Summary

Recommended Council Action Choose an item.
Suggested Motion Options Click or tap here to enter text.

Strategic Focus Area Livable Community
Strategic Plan Objective LC1: Enhancing Residents' Sense of Safety and
Reducing Crime
Anticipated Fiscal Impact No Material Fiscal Impact

Summary of Information

Background

In 2016, the North Carolina General Assembly passed S.L. 2016-88 which authorized the establishment of needle and hypodermic syringe exchange programs. Said law established the requirements and prerequisites to be followed by operators of such programs. Not long after the passage of S.L. 2016-88, a needle exchange program was established in Winston-Salem. The Twin City Harm Reduction Collective (TCHRC) began operating a needle exchange housed within Green Street United Methodist Church (639 S. Green St) in the West Salem neighborhood.

In 2017, City Council began hearing concerns from residents in the West Salem neighborhood regarding impacts from the needle exchange program. As such, City Council requested that the Attorney's Office provide options for regulating the existing and future needle exchanges. From March 2017 through June 2017, the Public Safety Committee discussed the potential for amending the Unified Development Ordinances (UDO) to provide added regulations for needle exchanges. In June 2017, the Public Safety concluded their discussion on this topic without further action.

Subsequent to 2017, City staff received intermittent concerns related to the needle exchange program. In January 2024, former Council Member Larson began to receive an increase in resident concerns about the exchange. City staff met with

representatives from the TCHRC and Green Street UMC to discuss said concerns and options for mitigation. In mid-2025, staff began receiving an increased number of resident concerns related to the TCHRC. The concerns shared with staff center on needles being left within the neighborhood including sidewalks and within yards. Additionally, Recreation and Parks staff have noted increased amounts of needles found within Granville Park.

Zoning/Regulation

Once needle exchanges were authorized by passage of S.L. 2016-88, Planning staff had to determine how they would be permitted within the confines of the UDO. Staff made the determination at that time that a needle exchange could be considered accessory to a church or religious institution. This determination was based on the nature of the service falling in line with other social services traditionally provided by churches such as food pantries, clothing closets, etc. As such, TCHRC did not need a permit from the City to locate their service within Green Street UMC.

Zoning regulations are set at the local level with City Council serving as the final authority for changes to the UDO. Should City Council wish to revisit the land use regulations related to needle exchanges, they could choose to direct Planning staff to prepare a text amendment that offers options for the following:

- Limitations on zoning districts where needle exchanges may be permitted
- Changes to approval process/approval authority
- Spacing distance from residential areas
- Amortization of existing needle exchanges

Staff will be present to provide an overview of this item at the December 8th General Government Committee.

Analysis of Fiscal Impact

No fiscal impact anticipated.

Attachments

Committee Action	
For:	Against:
Remarks:	