

Resolution Relating to

EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF SYRINGE
EXCHANGE PROGRAMS, SYRINGE LITTER, AND THE
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF SYRINGE DISPOSAL IN
BURLINGTON

RESOLUTION _____

Sponsor(s): Councilors Litwin,
Barlow, Brown McKnight, Shannon,
Traverse, Carpenter, Grant, Kane,
Doherty
Introduced: _____
Referred to: _____

Action: _____
Date: _____
Signed by Mayor: _____

CITY OF BURLINGTON

In the year Two Thousand Twenty-Four.....

Resolved by the City Council of the City of Burlington, as follows:

That WHEREAS, the impacts of Substance Use Disorder, public health, and environmental safety have
~~remained of increasing concern for consistently been prioritized by~~ the residents, the Administration, and the
City Council of Burlington; and

WHEREAS, the public consistently and increasingly has reported concerns about a proliferation of
discarded syringes in public spaces through digital spaces like See Click Fix and social media platforms, as
well as during community meetings and public comment during City Council meetings; and

WHEREAS, syringe exchange programs play a critical role in harm reduction, reduce the spread of
disease and infection, and support individuals in managing substance use while also ~~providing education and~~
~~mitigation resources to address raising concerns about~~ the environmental impact of improperly discarded
syringes; and

WHEREAS, the presence of discarded syringes in public spaces, parks, and the waste and water
stream, has resulted in safety hazards for community members and employees, including incidents that result
in injury requiring urgent medical attention, as well as increased cleaning and disposal costs for the City; and

WHEREAS, according to Howard Center Safe Recovery staff, 20,000 syringes are given out every
month and roughly 5,000 are returned at Howard Center Safe Recovery on Clarke Street, leaving 75% of all
outbound syringes unaccounted for, and 2018 data indicated that of the 651,464 syringes given out, roughly
63% were returned¹; and

WHEREAS, the City of Burlington received over 740 See Click Fix reports of a syringe within the
first nine months of 2023, representing three times as many collected as the prior year according to staff²; and

¹ Howard Center Safe Recovery Fact Sheet, *Vermont Department of Health* [2018];
https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/OCC_Safe%20Recovery%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf
² “Discarded Needles Litter Burlington. What Can Be Done?” Seven Days 10/4/2023;
<https://www.sevendaysvt.com/news/discarded-needles-litter-burlington-what-can-be-done-39237083>

EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF SYRINGE EXCHANGE PROGRAMS, SYRINGE LITTER, AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF SYRINGE DISPOSAL IN BURLINGTON

WHEREAS, landscapers, property maintenance workers, custodians, and other service sector employees working in Burlington report increased incidents of being stuck by inappropriately discarded syringes requiring immediate medical attention and treatment; and

WHEREAS, employees at trash transfer stations have reported being stuck by discarded syringes as well as unlabeled plastic containers with syringes being put through recycling processes; and

WHEREAS, in contrast, large-volume syringe providers like hospitals are either pre-treating their discarded syringes or using certified medical waste haulers; and

WHEREAS, it is imperative to evaluate the effectiveness of existing syringe exchange programs to ensure they are achieving their intended public health goals while minimizing environmental and community harm; and

WHEREAS, the City of Boston has contracted with Addiction Response Resources (ARR) to operate a Community Syringe Redemption Program (CSRP)~~successful needle collection program~~ since 2020, which successfully resulted in the removal of almost 1.8 million syringes from the community last year; and

WHEREAS, in 2024 the City of Boston is adopting ~~discontinuing their prior needle collection program in favor of~~ a new program that offers people with substance use disorder the chance to earn money in exchange for needle collection, and will also include job training and skills building, and will provide harm reduction supplies and other related supports, and this program is being paid for with Opioid manufacturer settlement funds; and

WHEREAS, issuing unlimited needles to people who use substances improves the safety of drug use, but increases needle litter which is a particular hazard to children and workers who pick them up³; and

WHEREAS, engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders—including public health agencies, State officials, organizations operating syringe exchange sites, City employees responsible for waste management, and representatives from the downtown business and residential communities—will provide comprehensive insights and facilitate collaborative solutions; and

WHEREAS, substance use disorder impacts all Vermonters and Burlington's core values call on us to recognize the humanity in all community members and to support one another, including those suffering from substance use disorder; and

³ Boston Ends Needle Collection Program that Collected Thousands of Syringes Daily, *Boston Globe* [7/2/2024]: <https://archive.is/7ZZnA#selection-1981.132-1985.103>

WHEREAS, both the Board of Health and the Burlington Parks Commission have already started to review the issue of syringe litter; and

WHEREAS, the Burlington School District and other interested parties must be included in the discussion to address community concerns and educate youth on the importance of responsible syringe disposal;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council hereby refers the evaluation of syringe exchange programs and the impact of syringe litter to the Board of Health, directing them to conduct a thorough study on these issues; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Health is charged with engaging stakeholders — including, but not limited to, the Vermont Department of Health, Burlington Department of Public Works, local syringe exchange organizations, the Burlington Parks, Recreation & Waterfront Department and City-owned park cleaning personnel, Parks Commission and the City Council's Parks, Arts & Culture Committee, Burlington School District and parent/caregiver communities, Turning Point Center, and representatives from the downtown business and residential communities with a goal to gather public input on syringe litter and syringe exchange operations and develop recommendations for improvement; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Health shall remain mindful of the lived experiences of individuals currently experiencing substance use disorder and those in recovery throughout the evaluation process; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Health shall provide a comprehensive report to the City Council by February 18, 2025, addressing both the effectiveness of syringe exchange programs and strategies to mitigate syringe litter in Burlington, including recommendations for environmentally friendly policies and practices for syringe disposal, methods or costs for incentivizing safe return; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Health specifically shall include in their research and report, the programs currently and previously pursued in the City of Boston and other cities around the country to reduce needle litter and/or encourage employment and workforce development; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Health shall work closely with syringe service providers, particularly with Howard Center Safe Recovery, to better understand the unintended impacts of these services, to encourage their leadership to apply for State, federal, and private funding to support mitigation efforts, and to make recommendations to the City Council on possible initiatives or ordinances that should be considered regarding syringe exchange operations and disposal; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that in anticipation of the findings and recommendations, the City will begin exploring potential supplementary funding sources and partnerships to support the implementation of effective syringe disposal strategies and improve public health outcomes in our community.

References:

<https://www.healthvermont.gov/disease-control/hiv-sti-hepatitis-community-resources/syringe-services-programs>

<https://www.cdc.gov/syringe-services-programs/php/index.html>

ER/Resolutions 2024/*Evaluation and Improvement Of Syringe Exchange Programs, Syringe Litter, and the Environmental Impact Of Syringe Disposal In Burlington*

10/22/24