



Sunrise Forum

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City battles prescription drug abuse

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While the city of Sunrise has passed a moratorium on pain clinics, residents have expressed concern on other aspects of people abusing prescription medications.

Sunrise resident Mike Ryan, an attorney and candidate for mayor, approached the Sunrise City Commission at its meeting to relay messages he received from a concerned resident and business owners about a non-chain pharmacy in the city.

"There's an enormous loophole that remains and needs to be addressed," he said of the moratorium. "Not only do you need to deal with the pain mill and the pain clinics who are actually dispensing, but you need to tackle

the pharmacies that have popped up...that aren't following proper protocol and responsible business programs of other pharmacies."

Ryan said that the resident expressed how "uncomfortable and fearful they were" of the pharmacy, which he went to investigate on his own. He said he saw cars in the parking lot with out-of-state license plates and travel items in the backseat, such as blankets and "living supplies."

"You began to very quickly develop a sense that these were not people from our area but who had traveled to this location," he said.

Fort Lauderdale is a major hub for prescription drugs. According to

the United States Drug Enforcement Agency's National Prescription Drug Threat Assessment for 2009, people come to Fort Lauderdale from many states including Kentucky, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio and West Virginia to acquire prescription drugs for distribution. This is possibly because Florida does not have a prescription drug-monitoring program.

Ryan said the business owners told him they were feeling the "squeeze," and that people visiting the pharmacy ask to use their business's bathrooms or are urinating in the back of the building.

The City Commission asked

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Sunrise Police Chief John Brooks to address the problem. He said that some aspects are confidential since the investigation is ongoing, but stated that the department is "acutely aware" of the location and the situation.

According to the city's pain clinic moratorium, in the past year, the Sunrise Police Department has made 30 arrests and seized 1,870 Oxycodone

pills from pain clinics. Also, drug paraphernalia, marijuana and cocaine were seized.

Ryan suggested to the Commission a strong police presence to the area, strong code enforcement and drafting an ordinance that will close the loophole. He also asked City Attorney Stuart Michelson to look into public nuisance actions.

Assistant Deputy Mayor Larry Sofield, who was also approached by the business owners, said he

believed Fort Lauderdale had passed a nuisance ordinance just a year ago, and that the city could look into it as well.

Commissioner Joey Scutto said that the city needs to tighten up when writing ordinances to protect the community from the side effects of pain clinics and pill mills.

"We have to word [the ordinance] so that you can't be out of state, you can't pay cash," he said. "We have to make it hard [for them]."

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