

Special Pierce County Council Meeting Dec 15 2017

By Alison McCaffree

In response to the following news, the Pierce County Council held a special meeting. Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson and Seattle City Attorney Pete Holmes filed separate lawsuits against pharmaceutical companies on Thursday, December 14, 2017, including OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma, accusing them of fueling the state's ongoing opioid epidemic.

After opening the special meeting, the Council adjourned to an executive session with the Pierce County Prosecutor. After 30 minutes, the Council came out of session and Councilmember Young made a motion that the Pierce County Council should authorize the Pierce County Prosecutor to initiate litigation against Purdue Pharma and other major pharmaceutical companies. Councilmember Ladenburg seconded the motion. Council members present at executive session and the final vote were: Richardson, P. Roach, Landenberg, McCune, Young.

Councilmembers made the following comments before the vote.

- Councilmember Young, voting in favor, said that we have been dealing with the effects of the opioid epidemic at federal, state, local level for some time. The crises impact the counties system through the criminal justice, human services and public health departments. Litigation would seek injunctive relief of their practices and policies and to help pay for the cost of clean up.
- Councilmember McCune, voting against, said that there was not enough information, that the pharmaceutical companies are not to blame, and that the addicted individual has the blame. He said the situation is made worse by weak laws, not enforcing laws. He wants to understand the situation better.
- Councilmember P. Roach, who said she was voting yes, indicated that this was just a piece of the solution. She said there will be a huge effort and there will be many ways to fight back; this is just one on them. She continued that the financial commitment of this decision is negligible and that the county needs to be seeking federal funding – that both Obama and Trump administration have allowed for all counties.
- Councilmember Ladenburg said this is one aspect that we need to be doing to get these drugs away. The drug company behaviors have not changed even though there have been requests, for changes in prescription practices. She continued, saying that this crisis affects government in many ways – jails impact , human services, Sheriff responding to calls, etc. Many people are suffering; no one is to blame except the pharmaceutical companies.

Litigation was approved 4:1 with Councilmember McCune voting no.