



Press Release

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Tukwila Issues Emergency Declaration

October 6, 2023

Today, pursuant to powers granted under the Tukwila Municipal Code, Mayor Allan Ekberg has declared a State of Emergency to address the growing number of asylum seekers in the region who are seeking assistance in the City of Tukwila. Asylum seekers are those who have been lawfully admitted into the United States by the Federal Government while they await adjudication of their asylum request. This wait time currently averages upwards of four years from the date of their application for asylum until their asylum case is heard by a federal immigration judge.

The State of Emergency declaration allows the City to adopt emergency zoning rules, suspend competitive bidding, and seek funding from the State of Washington and the Federal Government to address the growing need of asylum seekers.

In the spring of this year, the Riverton Park United Methodist Church (RPUMC) in Tukwila started to see the arrival of a small number of asylum seekers on its property. The church has historically been a temporary home to those in need and those seeking shelter. Throughout the summer and early fall, the number of asylum seekers at the RPUMC dramatically increased from 50 to nearly 200 people, including family units with many newborns and small children. This number coincided with an increase of asylum seekers across the region which the City of Tukwila recently became aware of. “The Tukwila community has always been welcoming to refugees and immigrants from around the world. Many new arrivals to the United States have called Tukwila home in their pathway to citizenship,” noted Mayor Allan Ekberg.

On Monday, October 2, 2023, the City of Tukwila attended a roundtable discussion hosted by the RPUMC to outline how the City of Tukwila, other government entities, and non-profits could provide needed services for asylum seekers. Prior to the meeting, City of Tukwila officials had toured and evaluated the RPUMC living conditions of the asylum seekers to help identify immediate needs on the property and to begin coordinating with other entities to provide those necessary and vital services. “Addressing the needs of asylum seekers is bigger than one city and requires leadership and support from King County, the State of Washington, and the Federal government,” remarked Mayor Ekberg.