

MARIJUANA:
Community divided
over distribution

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marijuana on the youth of Sisters, the problem of odors connected to marijuana, and the feared deterioration of Sisters’ image as a quaint small town.

Twenty-year resident Ray Barnum was concerned about “adding another intoxicant to our highways.” He doesn’t think there’s any expertise at dispensaries and that “medical marijuana is not regulated as much as it should be.”

Barnum’s wife, Barbara, questioned why we would want to increase traffic in town due to marijuana businesses. She thinks of Sisters as a “Hallmark village” and doesn’t want to tarnish that image by allowing marijuana in the city.

Yvonne Sacco also said, “It’s not good for our little town. Retail marijuana makes it so much easier for the kids.”

Jeremy Davis, who moved with his family from Hood River where there are seven marijuana outlets, wondered, “what is the message we are

giving to our youth” by allowing marijuana businesses in Sisters.

Several people suggested that a vote by the citizens should take place regarding whether or not marijuana retail businesses should be allowed in Sisters.

Those favoring marijuana businesses in Sisters mentioned economic benefits to the city, complying with state law, and the hypocrisy of allowing another liquor store in town but not marijuana businesses.

Piper Lutes was concerned for the youth but thought “dispensaries that would provide education may be a good thing.”

Erin Herburger, who said she is “not in favor of kids using marijuana,” does believe it is a “parental responsibility to regulate what goes on” with their kids. She is “absolutely for regulated marijuana sales in town.”

Susie DeFazio thinks “alcohol here in Sisters is much more obnoxious, dangerous, and disruptive to our community. Kids need real education, not demonization or moral arguments.” She asked, “Why not allow a legal substance?”

Aaron Okura suggested that people study the research rather than rely on personal anecdotes. He pointed to Denver, where violent and property crimes declined after the legalization of marijuana in Colorado. He also suggested that marijuana “is harder to get on the black market when retailers have it.”

Several others also encouraged people to educate themselves about marijuana. One Sisters resident, who works as a marijuana dispensary manager, said she stresses education of all her customers. She said that in two years, no minor has tried to purchase marijuana from her dispensary, except for one acting as a decoy for the state.

City Manager Brant Kucera began the evening by providing an overview of actions regarding marijuana over the past several years both statewide and locally. In 2014, Measure 91 passed statewide, legalizing recreational marijuana use state, county, and citywide. The overall state vote was 52 percent for, 48 percent against. In the Sisters precinct, the numbers were 51.13 percent for, 48.87 against.

A vote took place in 2014

locally asking city residents to amend the Sisters municipal code to allow medical marijuana dispensaries. Ballot measure 9-101 was defeated 42.38 percent to 57.62 percent.

In fiscal year 2015-16, Council discussed adopting TPM regulations for recreational marijuana but took no action. Again in 2017, one of Council’s goals was to look into adopting TPM regulations for recreational marijuana sales in the city.

Currently, the City code states that no business license will be issued if the applicant’s business is illegal according to federal, state, or local laws. Because marijuana is still considered a Schedule 1 drug and illegal under federal law, the City has been unable to issue business licenses for any marijuana-related businesses. Because of this, no TPM regulations have been necessary, but the City wants to have TPM regulations in place in case the federal laws change.

Council and staff are doing their homework. They have visited marijuana businesses throughout Central Oregon

and spoken with officials in five municipalities and the Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office. Bend, La Pine, and Madras allow recreational sales, processing and production. Prineville only allows the sale of medicinal marijuana in dispensaries that are regulated by TPMs.

Redmond, like Sisters, relies on their business license to prohibit any sales of marijuana-related products.

City attorneys Jeremy Green and Alan Dale reviewed Oregon regulations on marijuana and presented simple drafts of proposed City regulations. There are state laws and regulations (OR5475B) governing medical marijuana. Recreational marijuana, which is regulated by the Oregon Liquor Control Commission, can be further regulated through local options including prohibitions like codes governing business licenses and land use. Local taxes above the state’s 3 percent can be imposed.

Council will discuss TPMs at their workshop on Wednesday, March 14, 5 p.m. at City Hall.

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