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Bill would stiffen drug penalties, require dealers to obtain stamps

By Nick Reed
 Of the Emerald

Marijuana and other controlled substances would be taxed like other products sold for profit under a bill just introduced into the legislature.

The bill, sponsored chiefly by Rep. Gene Saylor, R-Portland, would clear the way for increasing penalties on those caught peddling dope.

The selling of dope, which Saylor terms an "underground illegal business," should not be treated preferentially while others in legal market transactions are taxed, he said.

"This is not designed to get people who possess less than an ounce," Saylor said. "This is basically to provide law enforcement agencies with another way to prosecute dealers."

If such legislation is passed, the state would begin requiring drug dealers to buy stamps for supplies of marijuana, cocaine and other illegal drugs in the same manner as cigarette manufacturers and liquor distillers are required to place stamps on their products.

Drug dealers arrested would

then be subject to two actions; the usual criminal proceedings for possession and sale of a controlled substance, and an additional charge of felony tax evasion if tax stamps are not on the confiscated drugs.

Under current laws, possession of more than one-and-one-half ounces of marijuana is a felony, and a person who is caught with that amount is considered a dealer.

Section one, line seven of the new bill states a dealer is "a person who, in violation of ORS 475.991 to 475.995, manufactures, delivers or possesses, more than 42 grams of marijuana, or seven or more grams of any controlled substance, or 10 or more dosage units of any controlled substance which is not sold by weight."

"If dealers are successfully prosecuted, property could be confiscated, liens placed on them and they could be fined," Saylor said.

Saylor added if the bill passes, it will discourage consumption by making the cost of drugs more expensive and consequently less available.

Not everyone thinks the new

bill is a good or effective idea.

The idea of taxing drugs is a waste of time, said Bill Conde, a Harrisburg businessman and longtime activist for the legalization of marijuana.

"They're being clowns," Conde said. "It's a joke. What can it accomplish? Do they actually think that people who sell dope are going to come in to the state and sign up?"

Conde, who was a major force in gathering 85,000 signatures on the recent marijuana initiative, scoffed at the section in the new bill that states all information turned into the Department of Revenue will remain completely confidential. He claimed the names of the citizens who signed the marijuana initiative petition ended up on the desk of the state attorney general.

"It's ridiculous. They're not being serious," Conde said.

The recent drug laws are not actually designed to keep drugs from entering the country, but are really just an "open door" for law enforcement officials to spy on individual citizens, Conde said.

Most tenant protections to remain intact

By Scott Maben
 Of the Emerald

The Eugene City Council is likely to keep the bulk of tenant protections currently guaranteed in Eugene's condominium conversion ordinance, although some modifications may be made.

This decision came after the council met Wednesday to weigh the Planning Commission's proposed revisions to

the ordinance with testimony given at a public hearing February 9 that favored the present tenant protections.

"It appears there's a consensus on the council that the ordinance that has been enforced is on track with the needs of the community," said Mayor Brian Obie who officiated the session.

The council may amend the ordinance with moderate redefinitions of "special category" (low-income, elderly, disabled) tenants.

The current ordinance requires developers who wish to convert to provide special-category tenants with moving expenses, services of a housing counselor, comparable housing, or a lifetime lease if comparable housing is unattainable.

Various councilors said they were concerned with the broadness of these benefits. For example, college students who qualify for a moving allowance because of their low income may pocket the money and

move with the help of a friend, said Councilor Emily Schue.

"I'm going to favor amending it somewhat so we can get the kind of protection to the people who need it and not give protection to people who financially don't. We don't want to subsidize wealthy folks," said Councilor Jeff Miller.

The ordinance specifically benefits tenants 62 years old or older, whose income is at 80 percent or less of the area's median income, or who are handicapped.

The Planning Commission proposes to offer only half of the current special category benefits — moving expenses and housing counselor services — to tenants who make 50 percent of the median; who are age 70 or older and substantially disabled; or earn 80 percent of the median and are substantially disabled.

The commission recommended comparable housing and lifetime lease be deleted, but the city council decided not to tamper with those provisions.

Also at issue Wednesday was who should finance tenant provisions.

Councilor Rob Bennett, who owns the high-rise apartment complex Eugene Manor, said he thinks the community should pay the cost of relocating tenants who can't afford condos. In the case of a conversion the developer "is going to pass all the costs he can... to the ultimate purchaser of the unit," Bennett said.

"What we're doing is transferring the social cost that should be borne by everybody in the community as a whole to the eventual purchaser of the condominium, who may be some middle-income folks who happen to want to own a condominium," Bennett told the council. He added by saying he believes this kind of pressure on the developer "is not right."

A developer can make a

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