

Voices From the Crowd: A Cannabis Vision for Vernonia

By David Mile

I was raised just 35 miles from here – the Cedar Hills area to be exact – and remember well my first visit to Vernonia as a kid on a scout trip in the mid-sixties, thinking how cool it looked, like a wild-west town in the middle of the woods. Later, in the mid-seventies, when the *very* cool and influential older brother of my very best friend moved here once-and-forever, onto a beautiful property just north – well, after that, Vernonia just took on a very special mystique for me and a permanent spot on my list of “very cool places to visit.”

So when we found my mother the perfect house here with an ancillary living unit I could eventually occupy, I couldn't have been more pleased at the prospect of moving here permanently. This combination of real rural isolation and urban proximity is ideal. Can't figure out why that hasn't caught on.

By way of introduction, I'm

the fellow who has approached the city on the topic of converting the Lincoln School for commercial use in the cannabis context. I have formed a provisional partnership of highly qualified investors with shared intent to execute on a business plan that we have been germinating since October. That plan will be described here, and further in the weeks ahead online.

I should explain to you that while my topic here is the cannabis industry, I come from the technology sector, where I worked as a type of business analyst and developed a special interest in emerging industries. This is the emergent era of the cannabis industry, and as such, it represents opportunities for creative commercial invention of new business types like no other time. In our case, it becomes a shared opportunity for participatory design where everyone with an interest in the outcome becomes a stakeholder, and the inputs of all stakeholders are accounted for in the final design of the new enterprise. It's a concept of community design commonly employed in software development.

Our own city council has already demonstrated a sense for this in the new “time, place and manner” ordinances for cannabis businesses. They've proposed prohibiting the marijuana leaf symbol in business signage, which is brilliant; it's precisely the type of symbolism that we needn't perpetuate here. This ain't Reno. And explicitly prohibiting any sort of commercial gathering place for the consumption of cannabis is also very insightful. It's a terrible idea with no

prior example that won't sort itself out for years. Sure these ordinances are just city business, but as a former art student I regard these as great design decisions, because they are.

When we talk about the economic benefits of the cannabis industry for the region, the conversation extends way beyond my group's proposal. There are several large producer/processors spinning up in Columbia County, and at least two others in our zip code, both very near, one located on a beautiful property whose proprietor has expressed explicit interest quite independently in the potential tourist aspects. As I'll describe, my group's ambition is not specifically in drawing tourists as a principal business. But seen collectively, if there were to emerge here two or more compelling new-industry business destinations open for public tour in close proximity, then we can become an identifiable agricultural district of sorts, as a potentially popular place to visit, like the wine districts are, with the collective potential of contributing *very* meaningfully to the local economy and specifically to the number of visitors passing through our town, which should be of interest to every merchant here.

In terms of contribution to the city budget, the rules allow for local jurisdictions to directly collect a 3% excise tax on retail sales of marijuana. If the dispensary on Bridge Street performs only as well as the average recreational store in Washington, that would mean \$72,000 annually in new revenue to the city.

In terms of employment, a mid-tier commercial grow like the two near here will each employ 10-18 folks. In our case, we seek to utilize the schoolhouse primarily as a manufacturing facility for infused products – the edibles category. The creation and manufacture of new consumer products of this type is the principal focus of my provisional partners, and we're certain we can keep the place buzzing, easily employing 25+ in a range of jobs and pay scales. And these jobs are popular – these are invariably fun places to work. We get lots of local inquiries.

We live 400 feet from the Lincoln School, and like you, we regard it as Vernonia's finest architectural treasure, and we believe our proposed commercial repurposing of the building for use in light foodstuff manufacture is an ideal use case. Think of the

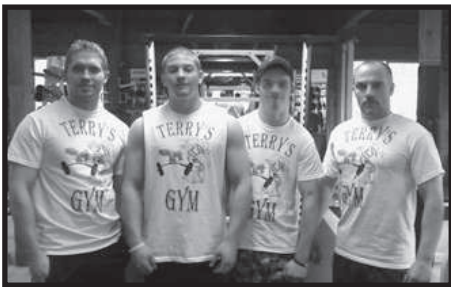
mechanical footprint of Bruce's Candy Kitchen in Cannon Beach in two or three of the classrooms. We can improve the property significantly while maintaining its architectural integrity and all the features of the original classrooms and common areas. We intend to install a small grow operation in the basement – in a new “micro-canopy” scale category. It is a practical use of the space, but is primarily for exhibition purposes, with the growing chambers viewable behind glass. The use in such a unique manner of a building of such architectural character will be entirely unique in the industry, and the opportunity in that is for all of us. The building could very likely serve as an anchor destination of a bona fide agricultural district and destination craft industry region. And it is our assertion that we can do this in a manner and design respectfully befitting this place and to the legitimate chagrin of no one – that is, if everyone with an interest in the outcome participates as a vested stakeholder in a productive, elevated conversation.

Here's how we would like to proceed: We have launched a new blog site at www.vernonia.green. We've published our Statement of Social Responsibility, and will post there over the next couple of weeks articles elaborating on business and operations aspects, etc. We'll announce new articles on Facebook and invite review and comment from the community. We then will collect and collate all stakeholder input, and publish it all as a document and list of requirements that would read something like this:

- The operation must provide suitable off-street parking to accommodate X number of vehicles.
- The operation must conform to standards and practices demonstrative of environmental and economic sustainability.
- The operation may display no neon or electronic signage, or any exterior symbol suggestive of cannabis whatsoever.

This document constitutes a Functional Design, and in software, this is what you kick upstairs for approval and project funding. In our case, this is the document we'd like to deliver to the City Council for consideration when we request an up-or-down vote on our motion to change the language in the conservation easement that currently prohibits our business proposal.

Terry's Gym



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Vernonia's Voice is published twice each month on the 1st and 3rd Thursday. Our next issue will be out April 7.

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