

Planning Commission approves new pot store at Cannery Lofts

Many condo residents objected

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Over the objections of several residents, the Astoria Planning Commission on Tuesday approved a conditional use permit for a marijuana store on the ground floor of the Cannery Lofts.

Daryl Bell and Terrell Buckner are opening a marijuana store called West, which they said would be upscale and a good neighbor to the condos above.

Bell had approached Ted Forcum, who owns a condo and the commercial spaces on the ground floor, about opening a marijuana store and art gallery. A city staff report said the gallery portion had been dropped. The storefront is in a tourist-oriented retail zone, where at least half of business must be geared toward visitors. Classified as a nontourist retail store, West needed a conditional use permit.

Bell is also trying to open a West location on East Harbor Drive in Warrenton. The Warrenton City Commission voted to restrict marijuana businesses east of U.S. Highway 101. Bell's project, CBDB Developments, was grandfathered in on the west side of the highway, having been started before the restriction. But under another city ordinance passed last summer, CBDB can only sell to medical cardholders.

Bell is also trying to open stores in Rockaway Beach and Pacific City. He said the Astoria store will be the first, likely opening in early December.

Residents opposed

More than 30 residents of the Cannery Lofts signed a petition opposing the store. Many came out Tuesday to share their concerns over issues with parking, security, vagrancy and decreased home values they said the store will cause.

"I really don't want to have this parked in my home," said Nancy Walsh, sharing a common sentiment among residents that the marijuana store does not fit in such a residential area.

Forcum, a chiropractor in Portland, said he has had issues renting out the commercial spaces because of water leakage from the condos above. After turning down 12 requests



Windermere Real Estate

The Astoria Planning Commission has approved a marijuana store on the ground floor of the Cannery Lofts.

to place dispensaries on the ground floor of the condo buildings, he said, he was approached by Bell, liked the art gallery portion, understood the medical benefits of marijuana and found no adverse impacts by other dispensaries located in ground-floor commercial spaces.

Heather Hansen, director of the county's land use department and a renter at the condos, said there is no reasonable way to mitigate the negative impact of a marijuana store in a U-shaped building where many of the residents will have to regularly see the business.

"There are 30 front doors that will be impacted," she said.

Customers cannot smoke at marijuana stores. But residents were concerned about people shopping at West and smoking along the Astoria Riverwalk, along with the store's customers worsening the vagrancy residents said is already an issue at the condos.

Buckner said those issues are already happening at the building and would not be worsened by the store. He and Bell argued that employees and the required lighting and security cameras would improve the security of the area, while adding to the tenant mix in the condo's commercial spaces.

Residents argued the store would make parking around the condos more difficult, when the parking lot is already filling up at times. Forcum said the parking lot is at less than half capacity on average, and that the parking issues are caused by ongoing construction to fix the buildings' structural issues.

Limits of power

Staff had recommended approval of the permit, saying Bell's application met all the review criteria. Planning commissioners sympathized with the residents, but said they had to judge the marijuana store based on whether it met the conditions of a permit.

Planning Commissioner Frank Spence, the lone vote against the permit, said the

city faced a landmark case of putting a medical marijuana dispensary in a residential area. Commissioner Daryl Moore reminded Pence that the location is commercially zoned and must be judged as such.

Planning Commissioner Jan Mitchell said commissioners have limits in how they can act. "I cannot find a single reason not to support this," she said.

County loses tourism jobs for the winter

The Daily Astorian

Clatsop County lost 300 jobs in September as tourist-related industries wound down before winter, according to recently released state employment data.

The county posted a 5.5 percent seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in September, up slight from 5.4 percent in August and down slightly from the 5.6 percent last year. September's unemployment rate matched the state's and was 0.5 percentage points behind the national average.

Seasonally adjusted figures look at expected employment trends, comparing them to reality. The county was expected to lose 260 jobs, but lost an additional 40.

The leisure and hospitality industry, winding down from the summer, cut 260 jobs. Retail trade cut another 50, along with 40 trimmed by food manufacturing. Local government education added 170 jobs as summer vacation ended.

Seasonally adjusted payroll employment in September was 17,860 jobs, 350 more than the year prior for a growth rate of nearly 2 per-



*Preliminary, seasonally adjusted rates. Source: Oregon Employment Department.

Daily Astorian graphic

cent. Compared to last year, education and health services added 110 positions, along with 90 in leisure and hospitality. Professional and business services added 180 positions, largely because of the reclassification of a single business from the accommodations industry. Manufacturing lost 160 jobs, largely in paper and seafood processing.

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