

Co-op: Some revisions could be made east of the site to improve traffic flow

Continued from Page 1A

and then on to Steam Whistle Way. The intersection where 23rd Street meets Marine Drive can be busy. Columbia Memorial Hospital is just across the street and there is no left hand turn lane onto 23rd Street for someone traveling east on Marine Drive. During the height of the summer tourist season, traffic can come to a standstill on the main road.

Mill Pond residents warn there could be an increase in traffic through the neighborhood if shoppers use Steam Whistle to reach a traffic light farther east in order to avoid complications at 23rd Street and make an easier turn back onto Marine Drive.

LaMear agreed. "I think common sense just tells you people are going to come out of that parking lot and go to the light," she said. "I certainly will. I'm not going to try to get out on Marine Drive without a light. And coming in, I'll come the same way. Right through Mill Pond."

"I am not voting against the co-op," she said later, before the council voted. "I am voting against this proposal because I think there's some transportation issues that need to be covered."

There are changes that could be made east of the site to improve traffic flow in the future, said City Engineer Nathan Crater. He also noted that a credit union had considered building on this same site, a use that would have been permitted outright and never come up for a public hearing. The traffic generated by that use would have been similar, if not somewhat higher, than what is predicted for the co-op.

Price said the council needed to be "honest" that "we are considering rezoning because this is a beloved community institution."

She repeated a question Planning Commissioner Jennifer Cameron-Lattek had posed at a hearing on the co-op's zoning request in January, "What's the interest?"

"I think the interest is in creating a good space for a local community-owned business that has living wages ... we have good economic reasons for doing this and I think that's good enough for spot zoning," Price said, but added that she still considered it a "critical issue" that there is no left turn lane from Marine Drive onto 23rd Street.

Brownson said he wasn't going to hold traffic issues against the co-op.

"There's new businesses coming in," he said. "There's more traffic, more tourists. We're expanding. There's

more pressure on our existing road systems. There's no getting around there and as that area changes — no matter what happens, whether the co-op's there or not — it's just a crappy bit of highway intersection that needs to be addressed at some point."

In other business:

• The City Council approved logging plans on approximately 50 acres of the Bear Creek watershed. City forester Ben Hayes said the operations are intended to improve water quality and forest health over the long term by increasing the forest's diversity, structural complexity and resilience. The work will take place on a ridge between Cedar Creek and Fat Buck Creek. The city expects proceeds of around \$200,000 after harvest and reforestation costs.

Hayes and Public Works Director Jeff Harrington proposed commercial thinning on a tightly spaced spruce-dominated stand. The thinning will allow extra light to penetrate the forest and give remaining trees more space. Right now, the trees have gotten to a point where they have stopped growing, Hayes told councilors. Logging crews will also thin out an area where Douglas fir has been impacted by Swiss needle cast. This fungus attacks the crowns of trees and stunts their growth. The city will replant in this area.

• The City Council approved an agreement with the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association for a parking study. The association, working with city staff, will begin to gather input about how parking downtown is used and what the needs are, as well as complete an inventory of private parking. Eventually, the association hopes to create lease options with owners of private parking lots and connect them with businesses and employees who want reliable parking in the downtown area, freeing up more on-street parking.

• The city has begun looking for a new fire chief. A job posting is up on the city's website. Chief Ted Ames announced his retirement last year but said he would stay on an interim basis through the spring to help ease the burden on the city during a search for his replacement. City Manager Brett Estes said he expects it could be a difficult position to fill, but has contracted with a recruitment company to advertise the job. Astoria's fire chief is responsible for nine career staff and 14 volunteers. The job has been advertised with a salary range of \$86,105 to \$104,662. Applications are being accepted through March 22.



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Like many retailers in the area, Hi Casual Cannabis in Astoria sells a wide variety of products.

Marijuana: 'It's no surprise to me that there's excess supply, or that prices are plummeting'

Continued from Page 1A

Curry County, on the border with California, ranked second in sales per capita, selling \$310 worth of marijuana per person. Rural Baker County, with 16,750 residents and across the border from more than 600,000 people in Idaho's Treasure Valley, sold \$16 million worth of marijuana last year, or \$960 per person. Multnomah County sold \$176 million in marijuana products last year, or \$220 per person, the fourth-highest rate statewide.

"I think it's just the beginning," said Don Morse, director of the Oregon Cannabis Business Council, a trade association. "I think sales are going to increase, and they'll certainly get a lot higher as we take away from the black market."

But Morse and others see consolidation coming among the more than 500 retailers and 900 growers statewide.

A presentation by New Frontier Data economist Beau Whitney noted the industry was reaching saturation. Retailers need about \$125,000 in monthly sales to be viable, but are averaging \$92,000 a month in Oregon, leaving them in distress.

Part of the issue is too much marijuana being produced. The estimated maximum canopy being used by



ABOVE: Edible options are a popular alternative to traditional marijuana products. BELOW: Most marijuana retailers in the area sell a variety of edible alternatives.



growers has gone from less than 10 million square feet in 2015 to more than 20 million square feet, Whitney said. Between October 2016, when recreational sales started, and November, the retail price of a pound of marijuana dropped from \$4,440 to less than \$3,000.

"It's no surprise to me that there's excess supply, or that prices are plummeting," Whitney said, adding many growers are trying to get bought out.

Whitney has suggested retailers lower their prices to take price-conscious consumers away from the black market.

"In general, for every 1 percent or so reduction in price ... you'll increase your demand by 2 to 3 percent," he said. "That's conversion over from the illicit market."

The marijuana industry is also trying to tackle other regulatory hurdles, such as finding bankers to handle money and places to legally smoke outside of the home.

The Oregon Cannabis Business Council is planning legislation for the next session on social-use areas for cannabis, Morse said. A couple of cannabis clubs in Portland allow consumption, but are technically still illegal.

One issue, Morse said, is the state's Indoor Clean Air Act. "We don't even allow cigar bars, unless they were grandfathered in," he said.

North Fork 53, a farm and lodging on the Nehalem River in southern Clatsop County, had provided space and paraphernalia. But the business ended the practice amid difficulties turning a profit and creating spaces that complied with air quality standards.

On banking, the marijuana industry needs to show the state how much it is potentially losing in taxable income by businesses having to depend on cash.

"There's a lot of money floating around," Morse said.

THE DAILY ASTORIAN



TV SCHEDULE

Evening listings TUESDAY

Table with columns for time slots (6 PM, 6:30, 7 PM, 7:30, 8 PM, 8:30, 9 PM, 9:30, 10 PM, 10:30, 11 PM, 11:30) and rows for various TV channels (KATU, KOMO, KING, KOIN, KIRO, KGW, KRCW, KOPB, KPTV, KPCQ, TBS, KZJO, ESPN, ESPN2, NICK, DISN, FAM, FMC, LIFE, ROOT, FS1, SPIKE, COM, HIST, A&E, TLC, DISC, NGE0, TNT, AMC, USA, FOOD, HGTV, FX, CNN, FNC, CNBC, BRAV, TCM, SYFY, RFD) listing their respective programs.