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Council from 1A

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Councilor George Lyddon said, "You've done a great job putting together an impossible situation. I think your recommendation seems quite solid."

The other council members agreed that they were appreciative of the work done, but that is where the unanimous agreements marking most of their 2015 decisions ended.

The first issue was that the current council had not gotten a chance to address the moratorium.

"We need to have this conversation," said Councilor Joshua Greene to his colleagues.

To Farley he said, "You've done an amazing job and I actually feel horrible that you have gone to this much detail to do something like this without us having a proper work session as a group to talk about this."

Councilor Susy Lacer affirmed this.

"This is the first time this issue has come to this council," she said. "It's really unfortunate that the timing worked out

(this way). ... We have not, as a body, had a chance to discuss this issue and where we'd like to go with it."

The next issue was concerning the city's stance on medical marijuana.

Councilor Greene said, "I have this feeling when I look at this documentation that we really don't want to support this endeavor. The City of Florence doesn't want medical marijuana anywhere near it, so we're going to make it so unattractive that no one's going to come near it. I think the bigger conversation is: Is that the position we want to take?"

He went on to say, "Medical marijuana is not a gateway drug to heroin. It doesn't bring a bad element of seedy, greedy, terrible, low-life drug users hanging around a building. A medical marijuana dispensary is, by state law, ... very clean. Not stinky and toxic."

Greene also brought up the restrictions in place already on medical marijuana dispensaries and those eligible to access marijuana for medical reasons.

Councilor Ron Preisler said, "I happen to think medical marijuana is an extremely important issue. ... I see a lot of people and a lot of patients that are in conditions that they need medical marijuana. It gives them quality of life that they don't have."

"I agree with Councilor Preisler that medical marijuana is very important to many in our community," said Lacer.

Greene also wanted to consider the impact of medical marijuana facilities as a business.

"This is a real thing that is happening around the world. It's happening in our country now," he said.

"I'm trying to take the stigma off of this and have us look at this as an opportunity for economic development."

Lacer said, "The planning commission's recommendation for allowable siting is too restrictive, in part because of the limitations on available land and in equal part, because as a body this council is very pro-economic development. And under Chapter 9 of our 2020 plan, regarding economic development, it says: 'encourage actions and activities to promote the availability of new employment in the community.' And, with this (much) restriction, I don't believe that we are meeting that criteria."

"There's an opportunity," Greene added. "We're not

doing the work we need to do to prepare for the future. The very thing we keep talking about is we're not creating businesses for people who want to live here or raise their family here. Crazy as this sounds to some of us, this is a small business."

Mayor Joe Henry brought the conversation to the final issue, saying, "This is not the first discussion we've had about this. And now, you're making a case for economic development and a whole number of other things. ... What we're talking about is medical marijuana. And we're operating under a deadline."

Lyddon said, "This council is charged at this time to act on information we have, the recommendations that we have based on the committee, the planning commission's recommendation. ... It's our duty to go with the recommendation or not, and to perform the work of the citizens. ... Based on what we have, I'm satisfied with the

recommendation."

Greene countered with his concern, again, for the too-strict restrictions outlined in the proposal.

"Are we going to kick it north of town and make it impossible to be attractive? What is that really saying?"

He ended his argument with a plea to the mayor and the other councilors.

"May I make the recommendation that we visit a dispensary, or at least get footage of a video if it's legally accessible?" he asked.

Mayor Henry responded, "What you do in your spare time is up to you. I don't share your views on medical or recreational marijuana and I don't intend to visit a medical marijuana facility. We all may have differing views on this."

The council ended the public hearing with Henry entertaining a motion to hold a council work session with the planning commission and staff, which the council agreed upon.

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