

Local & State

PROPOSERS GATHERING SIGNATURES TO PUT INITIATIVE ON NOVEMBER BALLOT

La Grande voters could get chance to approve recreation marijuana sales

■ Backers, who have until Tuesday to submit 1,200 signatures, have gathered 800

By Max Denning
Of The (La Grande) Observer

With the deadline quickly approaching to get on the ballot in November, the citizen-led initiative to let voters decide whether to allow recreational marijuana sales in La Grande has collected more than 800 signatures of the necessary 1,200.

At a rally held at Max Square on July 11 before the City Council meeting, around 30 supporters of the initiative gathered. David Moyal, co-sponsor of the initiative and chief petitioner, said he was impressed with the amount of signatures they had collected so far.

"I think it's an amazing achievement considering we've done it in nine days," Moyal said.

If the ballot initiative doesn't receive 1,200 signatures by Tuesday, July 17, then supporters of repealing the ban will have to wait until 2020 to try again to get it on the ballot.

In 2014, recreational marijuana was made legal in Oregon; however, Gov. Kate Brown allowed counties that voted against legalization to vote on whether to legalize dispensaries. The City of La Grande had a very close vote for the legalization, but ultimately voted against it.

This led to the city council opting out of the sale of recre-

ational marijuana. This April, however, the city council revisited the issue and voted 5-2 in support of taking steps toward letting citizens decide whether to repeal the ban.

In May, the council held the first formal reading of the measure, without much discussion from the public or the council itself.

At the June city council meeting, the second reading of the measure was held, and more opponents to repealing the ban attended the meeting.

After their testimony, the council voted 6-1 to leave the ordinance as is, with councilor Nicole Howard being the single vote against.

"They closed off the democratic process from both ends," Moyal told The Observer on July 10. "They said, 'Well we're not going to give it to the people to vote and we're not going to give it enough time for an initiative process either.'"

Moyal said he had originally pulled the paperwork to start a citizen ballot initiative in March, but halted his efforts when the council began steps toward letting citizens vote in April.

Some petition signers are more focused on the democratic process than they are on legalizing marijuana, Moyal said.

"I can't tell you how many

people say that, 'I don't use pot and I don't approve of the use of pot, but I think that we should be able to vote on it.' I've heard that response dozens of times," Moyal said.

Many of the petitioners and individuals who signed the petition at the rally, mentioned potential tax revenue from marijuana sales as a reason to support it.

Haley Pullem, a La Grande resident who signed the petition at the rally, said she thinks the potential tax revenue from marijuana sales is worth considering.

"This is actually really important because it could mean a lot of tax dollars coming into our town and that seems like something the city should vote on," she said.

Moyal, who sits on the city's budget committee, said it would be the "height of foolishness" to ignore an extra potential revenue stream.

"I look at how tight the budgets are and how we have to scrimp and save on everything from new vehicles to infrastructure for water system sewage to services for kids and parks and rec," he said. "Our budget is so close to the bone it's ridiculous."

In January, the East Oregonian reported Pendleton had brought in \$130,000 in marijuana tax revenue in the first half of the 2018 fiscal year. Moyal said he believes

La Grande could bring in at least \$120,000 to \$130,000 a year in marijuana tax revenue.

For some local business owners, the current ban is limiting business. Rona Lindsey, owner of Highway 30 cannabis, a medical marijuana dispensary, said she lost a significant amount of business due to the ban.

"Last year I had over 3,000 people stop at my store — I kept a record of it — asking for recreational," Lindsey said. "Those were 3,000 people who were here to spend their money, to buy gas, to eat lunch, but they got mad because they couldn't buy and said 'We'll just go on down the road to Pendleton or we'll go to Huntington.'"

Statewide there are five cities that previously banned recreational marijuana sales where residents will be voting on whether to repeal the ban in November.

Even if the ballot initiative doesn't receive the necessary 1,200 signatures, Moyal said it will not be the end of the effort to vote on reversing the ban in La Grande.

"If we don't make it this year, we'll just wait two years and I'm telling you 2020 this is going to happen, because I'll start doing it in February," Moyal said.

"And there's no doubt we'll get the signatures."

LOCAL BRIEFING

City planners to consider subdivision

The Baker City Planning Commission will meet Wednesday at 7 p.m. at City Hall, 1655 First St., to consider an application for a subdivision that would have 28 two-story townhouses on a nearly 3-acre parcel near Sam-O Swim Center in east Baker City.

Kevin and Kimberly Luckini have submitted an application for the Park Springs subdivision just south of Sam-O. It would include seven separate structures, each of which would have four townhouses.

A couple who live just south of the proposed subdivision are asking the Planning Commission to reject the proposal due to the number of residences.

BHS Class of 1955 plans reunion

The Baker High School Class of 1955 is having what classmates are terming a "mini-reunion" on July 20-21.

Anyone who can attend is invited to meet at the Haines Steak House at 6:30 p.m. Friday, July 20. Participants will order off the menu.

On Saturday, July 21, the group will meet at 6:30 p.m. at the Baker Elks Lodge, 1896 Second St. Again, classmates will order off the menu and pay for their own meals.

"We can just have a big get-together and catch up," organizers stated in a press release.

Members of other classes are welcome to join the group as well.

More information is available by calling Nancy at 541-519-6774 or Howard at 541-523-4088.

BHS classes of '48, '49, '50 to gather

Members of the Baker High School classes of 1948, 1949 and 1950 are invited to a reunion breakfast during Miners Jubilee, on Saturday, July 21, at 8 a.m. at Geiser-Pollman Park.

More information is available by calling Mary Johnson at 541-523-7055.

Yogurt-making class set for July 18

The Baker City Farmers Market's Intro to Fermentation class series continues on July 18 with a class on yogurt-making. Participants will learn how to make their own yogurt and go home with a pint of fresh yogurt.

The class costs \$15 and is limited to 10 people. It will take place at 5:30 p.m. during the Farmers Market, which runs from 3 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. each Wednesday at 2600 East St. To register, go to www.bakercityfarmersmarket.com

The final subject in the series is sauerkraut, scheduled for Aug. 15.

NEWMAN

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Patrol Officer Mike Durr, the first of three officers to leave Baker City in recent months, departed in April to return to John Day as that city's police chief. Durr, a retired Oregon State Police officer and former member of the John Day Police Department, spent just five months in Baker City before the opportunity to return to John Day as a police administrator was offered to him.

Durr, 62, said he planned to work another four years in Baker City and then retire. But when he was offered the job of police chief in the town where he's made his home for 33 years and where his wife, Pam, had remained, he felt compelled to take it.

"It was one of the hardest decisions I've had to make, coming back to John Day," Durr said. "The big advantage is I get to be with my wife."

The two, who have been married for 43 years, have a close relationship, he said. "I don't have any ill feelings toward Baker," Durr said in a telephone interview from his John Day office. "I absolutely had a ball over there, but in my off time, I missed my wife."

He also felt an obligation to return to John Day.

"This is my community," he said, adding that he hadn't been in Baker City long enough to develop that strong tie there.

Daniel Paleyo, another former John Day police officer who moved to Baker City in 2014 after five years with the John Day department, left Baker City for a job with the Prineville Police Department, Newman said. Paleyo had served as a detective with the department for the past year.

And officer Ben Wray, who joined the Baker City Police in July of 2016, accepted

"In the position we're in right now, our people are working pretty stinking hard."

— **Dustin Newman,**
Baker City Police chief

a position as lieutenant of the Corrections Division of the Baker County Sheriff's Office.

Durr describes the triple departure of the officers as "a perfect storm" that, in his experience, could have happened at any time depending on opportunities that come along for the officers.

"You can't fault anyone for taking a position to better himself," he said.

And though it is a stressful time for the Baker City Police Department, Newman said he is proud of how his officers are working to meet the challenge.

"I think we're going to be all right," he said. "It does put more stress on them right now, but they are stepping up."

Baker City Manager Fred Warner Jr. added his support for the officers as well.

"The troops over there are really all banding together and working really hard to get through this busy summer season," he said.

Newman said he will supplement the force by working some patrol shifts along with detective Jay Lohner, and sergeants Wayne Chastain and Mike Regan.

"Overtime definitely will be affected," Newman said.

The department is awaiting background checks on two officers who will require four months at the police academy before they are ready to start their careers with the Baker City Police.

Newman also is advertising for a new lieutenant and a new certified officer to join the force.

Warner said he's hoping to find people who are a good fit

for the community.

"We want to make very sure they are embedded in the community and in small rural community living," he said.

"I do believe we're on the upswing and we are going to work through these vacancies and came out stronger," Warner said.

Newman expects to fill Paleyo's detective position with an officer from inside the department once the staffing is completed.

Right now, he says he's working to ensure that all shifts are covered and that his officers are getting the time off they need.

"My job is to make sure they have what they need to do the job the way they should be doing it," Newman said.

To do that, his main focus will be on the health and wellness of his staff.

"There are things we can't afford not to do," he said.

With fewer people, those who remain will be getting tired, especially if they don't get their time off as scheduled, he maintains.

"To me, family is first,"

Newman says. "If things are good at home, work is easy."

"In the position we're in right now, our people are working pretty stinking hard," he said.

One adjustment that has been made already is to have Mark Powell, the department's code enforcement officer, also handle criminal complaints for which no suspects have been identified.

Unlike the certified officers, who work rotating 12-hour shifts, Powell works five eight-hour days with no overtime unless authorized by a supervisor for special events, said Julie Smith, the City's human resources manager.

In order to provide backup in code enforcement, Zach Thatcher, a volunteer reserve officer since 2016, has been hired as a part-time temporary code enforcement officer earning \$16.50 per hour, not to exceed 20 hours per week. Benefits are not included in the temporary position, Smith said. In his first month in the position Thatcher has been working 16 to 18 hours per week.

"These are ways we can

eliminate wear and tear on the officers," Newman said.

He also has been meeting with Warner in discussions the possibility of providing an online system for reporting crimes or filing accident reports and other matters.

Newman says he believes morale has remained "pretty good" among the officers.

"It's like anything," he said. "There's a change. Cops don't like change."

"They're feeling it out a bit and at least giving me an opportunity," he said. "I've got to prove myself to them."

As the new police chief, Neman's administrative duties require him to attend meetings and other public functions, work on policies, procedures and budgets and review time sheets and make sure the officers are receiving mandated trainings.

The chief also coordinates with the Oregon Department of Transportation to issue permits for special events, such as the recently completed bicycle races and the Hells Canyon Motorcycle Rally, Miners Jubilee events and the Shrine Parade. And he attends City Council

meetings upon request and handles any safety concerns that might come up within the city.

Another priority for Newman will be establishing his own relationships with the Sheriff's Office and Oregon State Police.

He has a head start in that regard, having known Sheriff Travis Ash since the two attended drug recognition expert (DRE) training in 2002 while Ash was working for the Prineville Police Department and Newman was working for the Polk County Sheriff's Office at Dallas.

Newman also has come to know Lt. Sean Belding of the Oregon State Police and Baker County Sheriff's Department Lt. Jef Van Arsdall through his role as lieutenant for the police department.

Newman says he's confident he can call on the help of these other agencies if needed during the current staffing shortage.

"I think that's the beneficial thing," he said. "You have to establish relationships on the front end, so when stuff happens we're ready to go."

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