

Council wants breathing space on medical marijuana shops

By Jeanne Davant

Medical marijuana dispensaries would not be allowed to set up shop in Manitou Springs for 90 days under an ordinance passed on first reading by City Council on Tuesday night.

Council members said they needed time to consider limitations including where such businesses would be permitted.

The city has had several inquiries from people who indicated they wanted to open medical marijuana shops in town, but there currently are no regulations governing their operation.

Council members indicated they are aware that medical marijuana dispensaries are generating significant amounts of sales tax revenue in Colorado Springs and elsewhere and were urged by a local man not to miss out.

"Manitou needs a piece of that action," said James Sawyer, who said after the meeting he does not intend to operate a medical marijuana business but was speaking on behalf of patients.

"The genie is out of the bottle," Sawyer said. "I don't think Council should try to block the will of the people. I realize this moratorium is temporary, but I think it sends the wrong message."

"I don't see this as sending a message that Manitou is not going to permit this type of activity," Council-woman Aimee Cox said. "I think we're trying to do it and be progressive about it. I see this as an opportunity to be fully informed. I'm not afraid of dispensaries in this town, but I want to be clear on what we're doing."

Council scheduled a work session for its next meeting at 7 p.m. Dec. 8, when it will hear presentations from the city attorney and a dispensary owner. City Attorney Jeff Parker said he would bring a member of his firm's legal staff who has been working with other communities on regulation of medical marijuana businesses. Council encouraged interested citizens to attend the meeting and state their views.

Mayor-Elect Marc Snyder noted that the moratorium might not last the full 90 days.

"Council could come to a consensus at our work session next week," Snyder said.

Pool manager presents business plan

Council also approved rate increases for nonresident users of the Aquatic Center.

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Manager Roy Chaney said he has been getting numerous calls from Colorado Springs residents, even before that city announced it was closing its pools.

Nonresident users will see a 10 percent increase in fees for daily use, punch cards and memberships. Rates for seniors 60 and older and disabled users, as well as for Manitou Springs residents, will not increase.

The rates still are lower than what Colorado Springs pools have charged, Chaney said.

Chaney also presented a business plan for a proposed expansion of the weight room at the Aquatic Center.

Chaney has requested \$110,000 for the expansion, which would increase the size of the room to about 1,500 square feet and allow multiple activities to take place there.

Chaney said the Aquatic Center would use the new space for classes including martial arts, CPR and yoga, parties and other activities. He figured the new activities could generate at least \$38,000 in revenue in its first year and \$152,000 over the next four years. The expansion would pay for itself by the third year or sooner, he said.

Chaney noted that the pool has seen a great deal of growth in the past four years and is now limited by lack of space.

"We cannot give what the patrons are demanding," he stated in a written report to Council. "They want more programs for their children and fitness opportunities for themselves."

Council will discuss funding for the expansion when it considers the final 2010 budget at next week's meeting. Tuesday night, members talked about how the weight room expansion would fit into the overall capital improvements picture.

Cox said that while she thought the expansion proposal is good, other projects, such as making the library accessible to disabled patrons, were equally important.

"How is it that this project rose to the top of the list?" she asked.

"This rose to its level because of its revenue potential," Finance Director Mike Leslie answered.

In other business, Council...

- Accepted an offer to sponsor a one-day institute on historic preservation that would be presented in April by Downtown Colorado, Inc. Mike Hussey of Nolte Associates said the event would be one of four conferences presented by the organization in 2010 and likely would attract at least 50 participants, some of whom would probably arrive a day early. Karen Cullen, owner of Victoria's Keep Bed & Breakfast, offered to pay half of the \$ 1,000 sponsorship fee.

- Postponed a hearing on the Red Craggs Estates' application to revoke or suspend a requirement to pave the inn's parking lot because the applicant, Executive Director Brett Maddox, was not present. The applicant was granted a conditional use permit to operate Red Craggs, On-a-Ledge and Rockledge Inn with 15 conditions, one of which was that the driveway and parking lot be paved by Nov. 1 of this year. Maddox stated in a letter to the Planning Department that decreased lodging revenues had made it impossible to do the work.

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