

City Council Report

By Marc A. Snyder - Mayor

Many in our community have observed in Soda Springs Park an unfortunate increase in obnoxious, aggressive and intimidating behavior by some park patrons. At our July 6 meeting, City Council asked staff to address this concern. Thank you to city staff, especially Police Chief Maryjo Smith and her officers, for responding so quickly and forcefully.

Beginning on July 11 and continuing for the foreseeable future, we will have a sustained, daily police presence in Soda Springs Park. Anyone who observes unlawful or untoward behavior in the park is encouraged to contact our police department. It is absolutely unacceptable for any park user, resident or visitor, to feel threatened or unwelcome in our city parks.

After an over one year delay, City Council passed a new panhandling/ solicitation ordinance in May. Although "passive" solicitation is constitutionally protected, Council chose to ban "active" solicitation in the downtown district and to heavily regulate "aggressive" solicitation city-wide. I am happy to report that there has been no resulting increase in solicitation activity. This new ordinance gives our police the tools that they need to effectively police our streets and parks. At the same time, this ordinance keeps the city out of constitutional hot water and allows for some street activity, such as street performing, that helps make ours a vibrant and welcoming community.

In June, City Council was asked to approve several changes, mostly concerning the parking lots, to the way we manage parking in our downtown. After postponing the vote in order to solicit crucial public input, Council approved these changes on the condition that we have a community meeting after the season and assess the resulting impacts. We are aware that these changes have created some concern and hardship for some residents and businesses and we remain committed to addressing these issues throughout this trial season.

Speaking of parking changes, the prospect of paid street parking (meters) seems to have riled up both proponents and opponents alike. Recent efforts by both sides to get a measure on the ballot, while premature, confirm that this is a divisive issue in our community. No proposal has been brought before City Council, no decision has been made and to my knowledge no members of Council have made up their mind one way or another. While such an important issue should ultimately be put to the voters, let us now commit to the open, transparent and inclusive process that has served us so well in the past when our community has faced equally difficult and divisive issues.

Medical marijuana is certainly one such difficult issue. After ten years of sticking their heads in the sand and ignoring the problem, our state legislators passed medical marijuana regulations on the last day of the 2010 legislative session. As usually occurs when political parlor games replace good public policy making, the resulting legislation is poorly written, confusing and creates more questions than answers. The only thing certain is that a large burden has been placed on local governments and that no clear direction for the future has been given. After eight months, during which there were several public meeting, much citizen testimony and even field visits to existing operations, City Council voted to allow dispensaries (now called centers) and prohibit grow and manufacturing operations. Council further chose to allow centers only in the commercial zone, to use the conditional use process and to put several additional restrictions on these businesses. As a conditional use, hearing will be held before both the Planning Commission and the City Council. We have chosen to move forward with a cautious and limited

approach because no one really knows what is going to happen in this industry in the future. There already are and will continue to be unforeseen and unintended consequences and we are trying to put the city in the best position possible to avoid problems.

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