

Articles

Council rejects lottery for selecting medical marijuana services providers



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Sifting through the 22 medical cannabis dispensary and delivery service applications the city received in February, was made a little easier for Ojai City Manager Steve McClary this week.

The Ojai City Council voted April 11 to discard McClary's initial call for a “public, random lottery drawing” to choose which applicants receive the sought-after licenses.

“I don't think the lottery is the right way to do it,” said Councilman Randy Haney. “Let's interview these applicants and let's pick the best three.”

The majority of the 22 applications came from businesses wishing to operate as both dispensary and delivery service.

See also: City gets 22 pot applications *Ojai Valley News*, Feb. 16, 2017.

The city will allow for three medical cannabis dispensaries and three delivery services to operate within city limits, over the objections of Mayor Johnny Johnston.

“We have yet to show that we are able to enforce our own regulations and supervise anything ... and I apologize to the staff for saying that. I don't know what is the cause of it, but trying to issue business licenses and building permits seems to be a real challenge for us to streamline,” he said. “It seems to me that we would be better off to do one of each license and to do it really well over the next six months and then build on that.” Johnston's motion to allow for only one dispensary and one delivery service did not receive a second.

“I always have a concern with state-sponsored monopolies,” responded Councilman William Weirick. “I like people having choices. And one is not a choice.”

The Council voted unanimously to require applicants provide proof that they have resided in Ventura County for a minimum of five years. The Council also agreed that applicants may not own more than five medical cannabis delivery services or dispensaries, in the spirit of Ojai's ban on chain businesses.

McClary confirmed that the new criteria “would definitely reduce the number (of qualified applicants).”

If after implementing the new application criteria, McClary still has more than three applications for a dispensary or delivery service on his hands, Council will allow him to form a selection committee to pick the three most qualified applicants.

McClary said such a committee would look at the applicant's experience, the quality and comprehensiveness of their business plan, security protocols, financial stability and competency of their personnel.

“I highly encourage you to pick people who have been doing this for awhile, because it's not easy. It's not fun and games. It's actually really, really hard to do it well,” said Chelsea Sutula, CEO of the Sespe Creek Collective and applicant for a dispensary and delivery service license.

Weirick reported that he was confident Ojai would not be the only city in Ventura County to allow medical cannabis services, as “Port Hueneme is hitting the pedal to the metal on this.”

“Taking the risk of libeling one of our neighboring communities, Port Hueneme is facing bankruptcy,” responded Johnston. “I think they're doing it for the wrong reason.”

Jeff Kroll, co-founder of the Shangri La Care Cooperative and applicant for a dispensary and delivery service license reminded the Council that some in the community have a dire need for cannabis medications.

“I get 15 to 20 calls a week,” he said. “I have not been in operation since April.”

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