

2 shuttered dispensaries among 12 seeking Ojai permits

Claudia Boyd-Barrett, Special to The Star Published 11:38 a.m. PT Feb. 23, 2017 | Updated 14 hours ago



(Photo: Joe Rondone/Democrat)

Two medical marijuana collectives effectively shut down by sheriff's deputies last year are among 12 applicants vying for operating permits from the city of Ojai.

The Oxnard-based Sespe Creek Collective and Ojai-based Shangri La Care Cooperative — both shuttered after raids by the Ventura County Sheriff's Office in 2016 — are seeking permits under new city of Ojai rules that allow a limited number of medical marijuana delivery services and appointment-only dispensaries to operate within the city.

In November, Ojai became the first city in the county to approve licensing for delivery and pickup of medical marijuana. The approval does not apply to recreational marijuana. City officials are now reviewing applications and, according to the regulations, can approve up to three permits for delivery services and three for dispensaries.

Altogether, the city received 21 applications. However, nine organizations — including Sespe Creek Collective and Shangri La — submitted two applications because they are requesting licenses for both dispensary and delivery services.

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- [Ojai OKs delivery, pickup of medical marijuana \(/story/news/local/communities/ojai/2016/11/17/ojai-oks-delivery-pickup-medical-marijuana/94049068/\)](#)
- [Ojai marijuana co-op hearing halted, continued to March \(/story/news/courts/2016/12/15/ojai-marijuana-co-op-hearing-halted-continued-march/95497548/\)](#)

"We got a lot of applications, but it's important to emphasize that those are applications, not the result of any vetting for qualifications," Councilman Bill Weirick said. "It's a gross number, not a net number."

All but two of the applicants listed Ojai addresses, City Manager Steve McClary said. The remaining two are based in Ventura County: Residential Roots in Agoura Hills and Freedom First Association in Oxnard. The other businesses applying are: Tree Factory, AGMD Logistics Business, Oh-Hi, The Bohea Club, Good Sense LLC, Medicinal Greens, Holistic Enchantment Inc. and Bryant Circle Collective.

Weirick said that once the city has completed the vetting process, licenses will be awarded through a lottery system. To qualify for the lottery, applicants must show proof of liability insurance and that they will not create a public nuisance. Licenses initially will be valid for a year and can be revoked if applicants do not comply with city regulations.

Not everyone is pleased with the lottery process. Jeff Kroll, founder of the Shangri La Care Cooperative, said his organization should automatically qualify for a license because the collective already held a business license to operate within the city. That license, issued in 2009 before the city enacted its medical marijuana regulations, allowed Shangri La to run a "horticulture social club, consultation, production studio and laboratory."

Kroll said he felt he was being robbed of a good opportunity.

"The fact is we've been basically put in a situation where instead of being rewarded for us being open and honest with the city," he said. "The lottery is actually, possibly seriously, going to penalize us."

Chelsea Sutula, executive director of Sespe Creek Collective, said she also had concerns about the lottery process. She said Sespe Creek has a large patient base in Ojai and she would be disappointed if the collective didn't get a license to operate there. The collective is currently closed because of the Nov. 3 raid.

Nevertheless, Sutula applauded Ojai for establishing regulations for medical marijuana businesses. She said the city currently represents the organization's only hope for reopening.

"It's kind of like a sanctuary city. We want to be where we're welcomed and wanted," she said. "They're really the first city in the county that really walk the compassion walk and not just talk the compassion talk."

Weirick said he expects the city to approve licenses by the end of March. Licenses will be issued under authority of the city manager and do not require City Council approval, he said. However, he said the council could further limit or expand the number of licenses available, if it chooses.

The council is scheduled to discuss its medical marijuana regulations again at the first meeting in March. Weirick said the issue before the council would be to convert the ordinance on marijuana regulations — initially passed as an urgency measure — into a permanent ordinance.

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