

Ojai OKs delivery, pickup of medical marijuana

Claudia Boyd-Barrett, Special to The Star Published 5:13 p.m. PT Nov. 17, 2016 | Updated 10:55 p.m. PT Nov. 17, 2016



(Photo: Joe Rondone/Democrat)

Ojai will become the first city in the county to license the delivery and pickup of medical marijuana.

At its meeting Tuesday, the Ojai City Council passed an emergency ordinance to allow delivery or pickup by appointment of medical marijuana from a nonretail location within the city. Distributors will need to obtain a city license to operate.

The ordinance tasks City Manager Steve McClary with developing the licensing system, which is expected to be ready by January.

The council voted 4-0 in favor of the city ordinance. Councilwoman Betsy Clapp was absent.

“We feel it’s a moral obligation to support people getting their medical preparations,” Councilman Bill Weirick said after the meeting. “In light of events recently, a lot of people have been deprived of their medicines and had their health compromised as a result.”

Weirick was referring to raids by Ventura County sheriff’s deputies on two medical marijuana collectives in the past year and a half. Advocates have said those raids effectively shut down access for sick and dying patients who depended on the collectives to get medical cannabis. The heads of those collectives — Chelsea Sutula with the Sespe Creek Collective and Jeff Kroll with the Shangri La Care Cooperative — spoke at Tuesday’s council meeting, along with several medical marijuana patients, in support of regulated dispensaries and deliveries in Ojai.

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“You are the last option in Ventura County,” said Sutula, who in an impassioned speech called herself a “political refugee” in light of the raid on her collective and her subsequent arrest. She is facing charges of possession of marijuana for sale, conspiracy and perjury.

“People are dying right now. People are sick,” Sutula said. “I’ve done nothing wrong but help people in Ojai, throughout the valley, throughout the county, with medicine they can’t find anywhere else in Southern California, because it’s not about getting them high; its about getting them well. You are the last hope.”

The ordinance does not allow delivery or pickup of recreational marijuana. It also prohibits smoking or ingesting marijuana — either recreational or medicinal — in public places or in businesses, and it bans outdoor marijuana cultivation.

Ojai’s emergency ordinance follows the Nov. 8 voter approval of Proposition 64, which legalizes the use and cultivation of recreational marijuana for people 21 and older with some limitations and creates a licensing system for commercial marijuana operations while still offering cities some regulatory powers. Under the new state rules, people can cultivate up to six cannabis plants inside their homes — more if it’s for medical use — but it’s up to local entities to regulate outdoor cultivation.

Several people at Tuesday’s meeting spoke to the council in favor of allowing outdoor marijuana cultivation. Council members pledged to return to the topic and discuss possible regulations at the council’s first meeting in March.

Sarah Armstrong, director of industry affairs for Americans for Safe Access, applauded the council’s decision to allow delivery and pickup of medical marijuana. She said she hoped it would inspire other cities and the county to do the same.

“I think it’s a very brave and very principled decision, and Americans for Safe Access is deeply grateful,” she said. “It allows people in and around Ojai to access medical marijuana that’s been tested, that’s supplied by people who adhere to state law. ... It also allows the county and the cities in the county to see that the sky does not fall when you allow a license for delivery services.”

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