

Council rejects delivery, hours changes for local dispensary

By Bob Burns
Times Reporter

The Town Council rejected a request by the Nature's AZ Medicines medical marijuana dispensary in Fountain Hills to increase its operating hours and offer delivery service.

The vote was 5-2 opposing the request. Mayor Ginny Dickey and Councilman Alan Magazine supported the request.

Dickey noted that the business is legal based on state law with Department of Health Services regulation.

State law allows dispensaries to operate between the hours of 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. The Fountain Hills Zoning Ordinance restricts the hours to 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

"It is not for us to say how they should run their business," Dickey said. "I can't oppose this as long as it is within legal limits."

Mark Steinmetz, Sixth Street Enterprises, owner and license holder of the Fountain Hills dispensary told the council the current allowable hours, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., does not serve the public interest.

"I believe access to medication is important," Steinmetz said. "There are only a couple of hours in the evening people can get there."

He added that evening hours from 8 to 10 p.m. are the busiest at another Phoenix dispensary owned by Sixth Street Enterprises.

Vice Mayor Sherry Leckrone opposed the change.

"I'm not in favor of 10 p.m.," she said. "If a new ballot measure passes it will increase traffic."

There is an effort to put a ballot measure to voters in November 2020 that would legalize recreational marijuana use.

Councilman David Spelich agreed with Leckrone. "We need to look at the big picture," he said.

"The last vote for recreational use was very close. I don't believe that the hours are as detrimental as you think."

Councilman Mike Scharnow is a board member for the Fountain Hills Youth Substance Abuse Coalition.

"I know how devastating drug addiction can be," Scharnow said. "Extending these hours makes it more difficult to keep kids away from drugs."

"The original ordinance was conservative by design and I see no compelling reason to extend these hours."

The original ordinance restricted the hours of operation to 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. In 2015 the council revisited the question at Steinmetz's request and reset the hours. Councilman Dennis Brown voted for the change in 2015, but that decision shaped his response this time around.

"You remember the last thing I said to you at the time of the last vote?" Brown asked Steinmetz. "I will stand by that position." Brown had told Steinmetz in 2015 that if he made another request for additional hours he (Brown) would vote no.

Other members of the Coalition spoke for the public hearing on the issue.

Coalition Director Shelly Mowrey said recent statistics indicate there has been a 33 percent increase in youth marijuana use, noting that many are obtaining the drugs from those with access using a medical marijuana card.

"Illegal diversion of marijuana is alive and well in Arizona and Fountain Hills," Mowrey said.

Pam Aguilu told the council she is also a member of the Coalition and described herself as the "resident addict," and talked about her addiction to drugs.

"If I could have had it delivered to me, I probably wouldn't be here now,"

Aguilu said. "I'm living with pain but I won't take the chance of going back to that."

"In my estimation, as an addict, this is a very bad idea."

Steinmetz said he was disappointed with the council decision, particularly after P&Z voted unanimously in favor of recommending approval.

"The Coalition has incredible influence over the Town Council, as they now have two sitting council members," Steinmetz said in an email to *The Times*. "Have you watched the movie 'Footloose,' or 'The Music Man?'"

"The Fountain Hills elders have spoken, and according to what we all heard last night, apparently we're all sinners who need to be saved from ourselves."

He added that the Coalition members seem to miss a simple macro-economic

equation. "When regulated cannabis is stifled the black market gains market share and becomes a bigger influence in our children's lives."

"Parents must remain diligent and involved with their children's daily lives. You can't zone that. The troubling issue for medical marijuana users is why this coalition of parents targets dispensaries. Why not drug stores and liquor sellers as well? The biggest addiction issues facing society today is alcohol abuse and prescription drug abuse."

Steinmetz indicates the council decision leaves the future of the Fountain Hills dispensary in question.

"This negative outcome limits our business terribly," he said. "We cannot compete effectively with our dispensary peers with delivery and (drug store) operating hours (8 a.m. to 10 p.m.)."

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Chabad offers Hebrew reading course

Rabbi Mendy Lipskier will teach a five-part course on Hebrew reading beginning Tuesday, Aug. 27, and continuing on subsequent Tuesdays at Chabad Edelman Jewish Center, 16830 E. Avenue of the Fountains.

"Whether it's the desire to pray in the original [language], read the Torah as it was dictated by G-d, or to read the many Jewish works that have not been translated, many people are looking to expand their horizons with the ability to read the holy tongue," said Lipskier. "It is in response

to this popular demand..." The time will be 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. Upcoming dates for the course will be Sept. 3, 10, 17 and 24.

The cost for the course, which covers all materials, is \$50 or \$36 for Chai Club members.

The course is targeted at beginners and those who wish to brush up on their reading. It will not cover comprehension or conversation.

Interested participants can call Chabad at 480-795-6292 or register at JewishFountainHills.com.



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Southwest wildlife needs help with food

The Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center has an urgent need for dry dog and cat food for rescued and rehabilitating animals at its Scottsdale refuge.

The organization's long-time dry pet food supplier no longer is making donations to the center.

The non-profit wildlife refuge is located near 156th Street and Rio Verde Drive. It currently is rehabilitating and taking care of 310 rescued animals.

For more information on making donations, visit the website, southwestwildlife.org.

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