

Recreational Marijuana Task Force Committee

5-21-17 meeting minutes (DRAFT)

Call to order/attendance:

Chair Terry Berry called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm with the following members in attendance: terry Berry (neutral), Louis Sigel (proponent), Jack McMillin (opponent), Jaime Schorr (opponent), Curtis Ayotte (proponent), and John Shaw (proponent). Absent was Karen Tucker (opponent).

Staff members Anne Davis (Interim City Manager), Barbara Skelton (CEO) and James Toman (Police Chief) were also in attendance.

4/18/17 minutes:

Louis Sigel moved to approve the minutes, John Shaw seconded the motion and the minutes were unanimously approved by attending members.

Public workshop:

Ian Andrews from the Wellness Connection of Maine spoke about production/agriculture/testing labs/cultivation of marijuana.

Curtis: Asked if they have plans to grow in Gardiner? Answer: Not at this time as Auburn space is 40,000 square feet with a harvest every week of about 100 pounds.

Ian continued to explain that they use custom fertilizer that they hand mix. He then explained the process of growth and how there is very little waste. The Wellness Connection has about 36 employees working in 3 different types of production. In the extraction process, the byproducts (leaves) are used to produce oils for vapes. They use all natural pesticides. They purchase and release beneficial bugs to eat pests (aphids). They have a security team that monitors the production facility, the centers and the administration offices. They have had no real break-in issues except 3-4 years ago they caught some dumpster divers looking for byproducts.

There are some marijuana seed banks in Maine. The Wellness Connection mostly uses clone donations and they nurture about 35 different strains. They have experts that select the best plants and they send product out of state for quality inspections. Wellness Connection leases space and has just invested in new environmental controls that keep elevated levels of mold at bay. Their corporate structure is one of a nonprofit with an executive director. Ian will check to see if he can share a P&L sheet with the committee. Ian also stated that the biggest barrier in production is that there are no standards for micro-biological contaminants and a good HVAC system is very expensive. Charcoal filters at their production center keeps the pungent smell down. Wellness Connection is planning on expanding into recreational marijuana production once laws are passed. They will probably create a for profit entity when this happens.

Dennis Meehan (Gardiner resident) is a medical marijuana provider. Mr. Meehan gave the committee a background on his personal and family health issues to explain how he decided to become a provider. He states that cannabis changed his life for the better. He explained the biology behind how marijuana works and showed examples of tinctures and other non-euphoric medicines. Barb Skelton asked him to explain how he creates the medicine? Did he think that there was room in Gardiner for a testing lab? (absolutely!) Dennis gave committee members his research documents and Curtis offered to keep them all together in a binder.

Curtis asked, "what can Gardiner do to help your small business?" Mr. Meehan replied that he has different issues than large scale production (tainted products, pesticides). Jamie asked Dennis how many patients he serves? He and his wife each have 5 patients (6 are allowed) and has a storefront at 189 Water Street. Caregivers may grow 6 plants for each patient and this business is the only income for his family...it is a true family business. He stated that he has an indoor and outdoor growing facility. It is very small and he would like to increase the space. He sends his product out of state to be tested and he creates his product from seeds and cloning. There are no employees outside of family members. Dennis would like to see some criteria for creating cannabis to fill a prescription. That way, doctors could decide better on the prescription. John Shaw would like it to be used for mental health issues as well.

Dennis would like to hire more people and expand his business but will wait until local rules are established. He cautioned members to not allow just the bigger companies the capability to expand. Curtis asked him how capable he would be to expand? He could expand to 10,000 square feet comfortably but cautioned that it is an expensive business to run. (utility charges and license fees).

John feels that there is a huge financial potential for any municipality that allows it as a business. Jamie wondered if Dennis would have his product in child-proof packaging? (yes) Barb told committee members that Dennis is acting as a home occupation business.

There were no other discussions with experts or with the general public.

Upcoming meeting:

Chair Berry reminded everyone that the second reading of the extension of the moratorium will be held the next Wednesday. (5/3/17)

Next meeting/adjourn:

This meeting adjourned at 7:45pm and the next meeting is scheduled for ***June 6, 2017 at 6PM*** in City Council Chambers.

Minutes transcribed by,
Anne Davis, Interim City Manager