

Dispensary Halted, Debated At Wood River Special Meeting

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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WOOD RIVER - Wood River City Council members narrowly voted to rescind an ordinance that would have allowed a dispensary to open in downtown Wood River after hearing several residents speak in favor of the business. The decision will now go to the voters in the form of a binding referendum on the ballot next spring.

At a special meeting that was called to discuss the topic on May 17, several people made public comments in favor of allowing the dispensary. One such resident suffered from lupus, and said while she herself didn't use cannabis, it could benefit others with the same or worse illnesses.

"By stopping the progress of a cannabis dispensary in Wood River, you are denying access a more natural pain relief for people like me who suffer from chronic, long-term illness," she said. "Cannabis has been long proven to offer medical benefits to those who suffer from this affliction, and some have worse afflictions than I do."

She added that she wants to see the city make faster progress and stop losing out on tax revenue to other cities with dispensaries like Collinsville and Florissant.

Former Councilwoman Sonya Hagaman was next to take the stand, and said there was no need to rescind the ordinance or hold a meeting, which she called an "absurd ploy."

"I'm here tonight to talk about this absurd ploy to take away an opportunity for growth in our city," Hagaman said. "All of you were here when business owner after business owner spoke in support the dispensary. You were here when private citizens expressed their sincere support. You even heard Wood River's own Chief Wells talk about the benefits of our town having a dispensary."

She also cited several studies which found, among other things, that cannabis-related businesses had a positive effect on housing prices, led to reduced neighborhood crime rates, and did not lead to increased usage among teens.

Wood River Marketing Consultant Kristen Burns said 25% of all tax revenue from the dispensary was set to go to the Fire & Police Pension Fund, and asked if council members were against that. She also said the developers have already spent thousands of dollars and hours planning the dispensary site, and this reversal could cause a lawsuit for the city.

After public comments concluded, Councilman Scott Tweedy asked the city attorney if a lawsuit against the city, in this case, was possible, and she speculated that it would be. Councilman Jeremy Plank said that he was “pro-business” but sought to further define the relationship between the city and its businesses, which he said is “the goal here.”

Councilman Bill Dettmers said as a businessman of over 40 years, he also supports businesses wanting to open in Wood River, but his constituents raised concerns about the dispensary and he felt it was best to let voters decide instead of the City Council.

“If the community decides that they want to have a dispensary, I will fully support it. If they want to have it in downtown, I will fully support it,” Dettmers said. “If they don’t want to have it in downtown, we will work with anyone who wants to have a dispensary in the city of Wood River - and in fact, if that is the decision of the community, I would be more than willing to increase the number of dispensaries in the City of Wood River.”

Councilman David Ayres said he called 80-100 registered Wood River voters he didn’t know personally, and said 36 of them were in favor of the dispensary, while 36 were against, and four had no opinion. Mayor Tom Stalcup said the city receives approximately \$16,000 a year from the state of Illinois because city officials said they would support a dispensary when cannabis became legal in Illinois in 2020.

The council voted 3-2 to rescind the ordinance that would have approved the downtown dispensary. Councilmen Bill Dettmers, David Ayres, and Jeremy Plank voted to rescind the ordinance and place the referendum on the ballot, while Mayor Tom Stalcup and Councilman Scott Tweedy voted to allow the dispensary without a citizen vote.

The referendum will appear on the ballot next spring as follows:

1. Shall cannabis dispensaries be allowed to operate within the city limits of the City of Wood River, Illinois?

2. Shall cannabis dispensaries be allowed to operate in the Downtown Business District of the City of Wood River, Illinois as defined by the City of Wood River's Zoning Code 96-14, Article 4, Section 4-9 Downtown Business District - BD and Section 4-13 Wood River Business Park - WRBP?

A full recording of the special meeting, including more public comments, can be watched at the top of this story or on the [Riverbender.com Facebook page](#).