



Public Responds To Wood River Dispensary Delay

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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WOOD RIVER - A few members of the public responded to the Wood River City Council's split vote to delay the development and opening of a dispensary in the city's downtown and place the issue on the ballot next spring, after the council held a special meeting on the subject on May 17.

Wood River resident Bill Rogers spoke during the Public Comment portion of the meeting and said he would not support a dispensary opening in Wood River.

"As for the referendum that's listed on the dispensary, my position has not changed - we do not need one, period," Rogers said.

Pastor Dave Landry said the three council members who voted to delay the dispensary - Bill Dettmers, David Ayres, and Jeremy Plank - went against the wishes of the public and are "scaring off investors."

"are voicing their concerns at the last special meeting on Wednesday . There was a sincere plea from citizens to keep the cannabis dispensary open ... but you didn't want to do it," Landry said. "You now have an opportunity to recant your decision ... committee members worked hard bringing developers and businesses to our city - with two council meetings, you three have managed to bring it all down. You're scaring off investors and businesses."

He added that with the growing number of other surrounding communities with dispensaries - including Collinsville, Edwardsville, and Alton - he's concerned communities like Bethalto and Roxana might open one next and that the council has "knocked Wood River out of an opportunity to make millions of dollars."

Former councilwoman Sonya Hagaman said the council members who voted to delay the dispensary are trying to “circumvent” the will of residents.

“Once again, an item has been placed on the agenda intended to circumvent the freedom of the Wood River residents and push through a close-minded ideology,” Hagaman said, questioning why the three council members who voted to delay the dispensary didn’t express any opposition when the ordinance allowing a dispensary was approved in 2020 by a previous administration. “This dogged determination that you are all clearly displaying regarding stopping the opening of a cannabis dispensary is putting your preconceived prejudices and lack of knowledge on clear display.”

Hagaman criticized the results of the May 17 special meeting for halting “progress in our downtown,” effectively pulling “the rug out from under a small business,” and making future investors doubt whether Wood River is right for them.

During the May 17 special meeting on the dispensary, Councilman Ayres said he conducted a phone survey which resulted in an even 50/50 split of those for and against the dispensary. Hagaman also questioned the validity of this survey, asking why it was conducted on the day of the special meeting between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m., when most individuals 65 and younger were working during that time.

“I feel like an entire demographic was left out of your impromptu survey,” she said. “Why wouldn’t the voices of every individual that stood up during that special meeting in favor of the dispensary not have convinced you that there were more citizens in favor of the dispensary than not?”

Later in the meeting, an agenda item proposed not allowing any occupancy permits to be granted for any marijuana dispensaries until the binding referendum has been voted on. Mayor Tom Stalcup asked City Attorney Rene Bassett-Butler whether this was the “proper procedure” to take in this case, and she said it was not.

“Not issuing an occupancy permit for a permitted use in the city would not be easily defensible in a court of law,” Bassett-Butler said. “If you wish to do away with dispensaries, that would be a matter of changing the zoning code in order to do that, but denying an occupancy permit for a validly existing use, there’s not a legal foundation for that.”

The mayor and city attorney further clarified that the proper procedure is to take the matter to the Planning Commission, who then gives their recommendation to the council, and then a Public Hearing is to be held before the council votes on it. The motion was amended to change the item to a recommendation to the Planning

Commission not to grant any occupancy permits for dispensaries until the referendum is voted on. The motion as amended passed with Mayor Stalcup and Councilmen Dettmers, Ayres, and Plank voting “yes” and Councilman Scott Tweedy voting “no.”

A full recording of the June 5 meeting is available at the top of this story or on Riverbender.com/video.

