



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Santa Cruz Cannabis Pharmaceuticals Director Ed Schindler said he hopes the club will be able to open its new Soquel Avenue location soon. Schindler is waiting for a special permit the medical-marijuana ordinance requires, which could take up to six weeks.

Cannabis club's opening won't be delayed by permit

By **ESTER RODRIGUEZ**
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A local medical-marijuana club could be heading for a showdown with city officials Oct. 1 if a special-use permit is not approved by the city.

City leaders passed an ordinance in June legalizing clubs that provide marijuana to the sick, as long as the patients have the permission of their doctors.

According to the ordinance, the marijuana dispensaries must operate in industrial or commercial-industrial areas 50 feet from homes and 1,000 feet from schools.

Santa Cruz Cannabis Pharmaceuticals has been operating in the Seabright residential neighborhood — and can do so legally until Sept. 30 — but hopes to move to 1723 Soquel Ave., according to Rudy Melton, director of Cannabis Pharmaceuticals.

But to do so, the group first must receive a special-use permit from the city, which is also a requirement of the ordinance.

Club officials submitted the permit application Sept. 15; but processing applications

can take about six weeks, said Eileen Fogarty, city planning director.

Area businesses are then notified and public hearings can be held.

Melton, however, said he has been given a preliminary approval by city planners.

If there is a delay, the club plans to continue operating, despite the fact it may be in violation of the city ordinance, he said.

"We won't wait," Melton said.

"The Planning Department will note that we're in violation and we'll probably be issued a citation."

City Attorney John Barisone said if the club reopens after Sept. 30 without city approval, club officials will be issued a cease and desist order, which would force them to go before the City Council.

The 3,000-square-foot Soquel Avenue space once housed The Impossible Restaurant. Melton said the building's facilities are being upgraded because many of the club's clients are physically disabled.

Jack Knoll, owner of nearby Wilson's Tires, said he is opposed to the club's new location.

"It's not the enterprise I object to, but the location," Knoll said.

A number of local businesses are circulating a petition to halt the relocation.

Meanwhile, another Santa Cruz medical-marijuana dispensary, Wo/Men's Alliance for Medical Marijuana, has been allowed to stay in its current location on Front Street as long as there are no complaints against the organization, according to Valerie Corral, WAMM founder.

WAMM, a collective, provides medical-marijuana to patients for free, though membership is tightly regulated, club officials say.

Corral said high rental costs have hindered her efforts to find a new home.

"We're trying to raise some funds and find donors, someone who can back us," Corral said.

Corral said she sees the relocation as a good opportunity to be closer to her clients.

"I'll move up the street and pop up a tent if I have to," Corral said. "We'll comply with the law, but we also ask the law to protect us on the streets."

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