

Medical pot club angers Seabright-area neighbors

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SANTA CRUZ — Some Seabright neighbors want the new medical marijuana group operating near them to go away, and the operators hope to oblige.

The organizers of Santa Cruz Cannabis Pharmaceuticals on Seabright Avenue said Friday they are two weeks away from moving their distribution and cultivation services to another city site, most likely in Harvey West Industrial Park.

Lawyer Kate Wells, who founded the nonprofit organization, said she plans to use the house for the group's administra-

tive offices and for her own law offices because the expected volume of marijuana customers will be too much for the small home.

The Seabright Avenue operation opened a week ago on the heels of the City Council decision to liberalize the rules for medical-marijuana organizations.

Some residents weren't happy about the new neighbor, however. Among other things, they said it is too close to a school and a church — Gault Elementary and Landmark Missionary Baptist.

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Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Robert Barandas posts leaflet across Seabright Avenue from the club.

Pot club

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"We don't feel this is consistent with the neighborhood and we will take every avenue to get this out," said Robert Barandas, who has helped form the Seabright Neighbors Against the Cannabis Club. "If this were a liquor store, this wouldn't be allowed, and liquor is legal."

Wells takes exception to the idea that a medical dispensary is bad or going to harm the neighborhood.

"The real story is these people (neighbors) say they are concerned for children when the examples they show is prejudice and fear rather than compassion and understanding," said Wells, pointing out that medical marijuana is used by people to provide some relief from diseases and illnesses such as HIV, cancer, anorexia and migraines.

Rudy Melton, director of Wells' medical marijuana association, said the rules of the club are strict, and he hopes all the neighborhood issues disappear when

it moves to another area. Even now, he said, no more than 20 patients visit the site each day.

"To a certain extent I have to agree with residents," Melton said. "Traffic will get busy here and that's why we're moving. ... As the word slips out we will expand and prepare for that."

Melton said he has about 150 registered members.

Wells said she hopes a lease will be signed for a place to dispense and grow medical marijuana before Tuesday, the day the neighborhood is scheduled to hold a meeting at Pacific Cultural Center.

The rules at the Seabright center are strict and follow the new city ordinance on medical marijuana use and distribution.

The ordinance was passed by the City Council April 11 and is set to take effect May 11. It recognizes medical marijuana associations under new regulations and guidelines. To qualify for marijuana, patients must prove they suffer from a dis-

ease or ailment that can be treated with marijuana.

Some of the Seabright neighbors, and critics of the ordinance, complaint that there is no city application system and no regulation of hours or location of marijuana operations. City officials say they are working on adopting some form of registration and regulations before the ordinance takes effect.

At Santa Cruz Cannabis Pharmaceuticals, patients wanting medical marijuana must first become members. They must show that they are members of another medical marijuana clubs, such as the Wo/Man's Alliance for Medical Marijuana in Santa Cruz, or they must have a statement from a physician certifying their diagnosis. The physician's statement also must document that the physician has discussed responsible marijuana use with them, is recommending marijuana use and is agreeing to monitor the patient.

The club is open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., Tuesday to Saturday.

While vocal neighbors are opposed to

the club, supporters say there is more support than it seems. On Friday morning, a security guard at the club produced a "welcome to the neighborhood" card given to the club by a teacher at Gault.

School officials have not taken a stand on the club's presence.

A few patients stopped by Friday. After showing their membership cards, they were taken to a back room, the kitchen, and were given the prescribed amount. Melton said most people get enough supply for a week.

Barandas said he understands that the patients need marijuana but said the group will attract too many strangers to the area, some of whom might be a danger to the residents.

Karen Card, who lives across the street from the club, said she is worried. She said she's seen people smoking marijuana outside the home.

"It's inappropriate," she said. "A lot of people feel if you need that drug for medical reasons, OK, but it should be set up somewhere else."