

City attorney wants to close medical-marijuana outlets

By **HEATHER BOERNER**
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Drugs

While local leaders of medical-marijuana clubs say they're disturbed by the Supreme Court's action this week to prevent the Oakland Cannabis Buyers' Cooperative from operating legally, what they're really worried about is a city action that could force them to close.

SANTA CRUZ

"I worked on writing this ordinance for two-and-a-half years and I never thought it would create this stumbling block," said Valerie Corral, executive director and founder of Wo/Men's Alliance for Medical Marijuana. "I never thought it could be used to displace us."

But the ordinance the City Council put into effect in June legalizing the clubs requires them to locate in

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VALERIE CORRAL, FOUNDER, WO/MEN'S ALLIANCE FOR MEDICAL MARIJUANA

industrial areas instead of the residential neighborhoods in which both clubs operate now. And while city staff has worked with both WAMM and Santa Cruz Cannabis Pharmaceuticals to help them find new locations, nothing has come available quickly enough

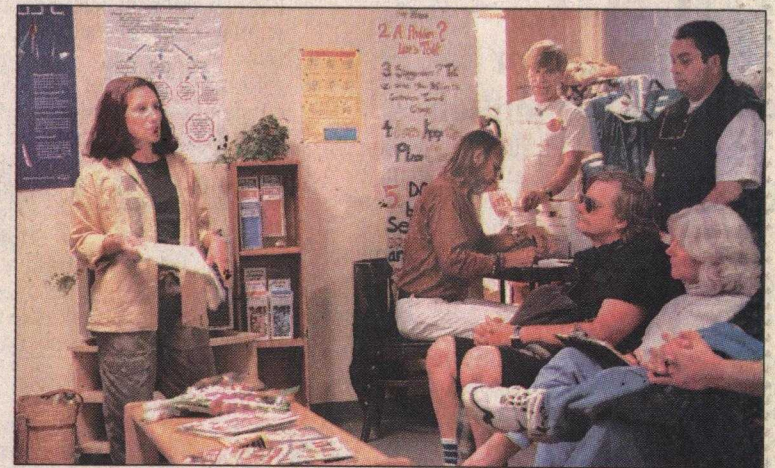
or cheap enough for the clubs.

City Attorney John Barisone said the city initially had planned to allow the clubs to continue operating in their current locations until Sept. 30. But under pressure from neighbors, Barisone said he's now planning to ask the City Council at its Sept. 12 meeting to allow him to file a lawsuit against the clubs, demanding they move or immediately cease operation.

"I'm pretty sure the council will agree," he said. "The ordinance made it clear that we're trying to balance the needs of the neighbors and the needs of the medical marijuana groups."

Barisone's decision was news to both organizations, even though representatives of both groups said they had received letters from Code Compliance Officer

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

Valerie Corral talks to her medical-marijuana club earlier this year.

Marijuana: Clubs unable to find industrial space

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Mary Alsip informing them they needed to move out of the neighborhoods and relocate in the city's industrial areas.

"I'm surprised," said Rudy Menton, director of Santa Cruz Cannabis Pharmaceuticals. "If they zone us out of existence, I don't know what they expect the 1,000-plus patients who use the service to do."

Corral said that if the city goes ahead with the injunction, she won't stop operating the club.

"If they insist on doing this, I'll just drive to the industrial area and dispense it from the back of the car," she said. "It may not be the best solution and it may not be the safest, but this issue is too important."

WAMM is a collective, accepts only a limited number of members and does not buy or sell the drug. SCCP is a buyers' club, in which members buy the drug for a nominal fee but are not allowed to make a profit off the sale.

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The ordinance the council passed in June requires the clubs to relocate; but also officially sanctions marijuana distribution for medical purposes. Patients who receive a recommendation from their doctor can become members of the clubs and receive a photograph identification card from the city.

The city's decision to crack down on the clubs comes at a time when medical-marijuana patients already are nervous about their use of the drug,

Menton and Corral say.

Both said their phones have begun ringing constantly with calls from patients afraid the stay the Supreme Court issued to the Oakland club will filter down to Santa Cruz.

Menton and Corral say, though, they don't think the Supreme Court's decision will affect city residents.

Corral said that her position is that the order only applies to the Oakland club and not to Santa Cruz.

"I have 39 messages on my machine right now from nervous patients," Corral said. "They're afraid we'll be forced to close. But really, it's always the same threat and the same fear."

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