

City Council to Hold Second Reading on Medical Cannabis Ban Repeal

Mansfield Grapples with Marijuana Dispensary Regulations Amid Divided Council

Mansfield, OH – The city of Mansfield has found itself at the center of a contentious debate over the introduction of marijuana dispensaries. After two months of intense discussions and heartfelt arguments from both supporters and detractors, the Mansfield City Council decided last month, by a narrow 5-3 vote, not to impose a six-month moratorium on marijuana dispensaries.

The council reconvened Tuesday night, with plans to vote on repealing existing prohibitions against medical marijuana. However, this vote, along with another concerning zoning changes, was postponed to a first reading. The council is now set to vote on these measures at their next meeting on August 6.

Challenges and Delays

“To get the initial permits, you need to be dual use (medical and recreational),” Mayor Jodie Perry explained to the council. “Allowing recreational but holding back medical marijuana doesn’t allow anything to move forward.”

Perry highlighted that the language for zoning regulations wasn’t ready for Tuesday’s meeting but assured the council it would be prepared by the next session.

Councilman David Falquette expressed his confusion over delaying the vote to remove prohibitions on medical marijuana, pointing out, “This really has nothing to do with zoning changes. This should be clean. I’m not sure why we would delay on that. Am I missing something?”

Strategic Waiting

Mayor Perry responded by emphasizing the importance of timing and strategy in the process. “As part of the licensing process, the dispensaries have to get a sign-off from the city, saying the location that they want fits our zoning, or that we don’t have a prohibition in place,” Perry stated. “We think it’s the cleanest to wait until we have started the zoning process. Once we repeal this, we have no prohibitions in place. Theoretically, they still need the city to sign off, but we think to hold this to one more reading in August, we can vote on it that night, and we should have the zoning ready to start at that point.”

Councilwoman Stephanie Zader was open to waiting for a second reading, noting, “I’ve already received phone calls from local real estate agents and investors looking for locations to put dispensaries in.”

Perry added, “We don’t want to see someone buying property and then having it not fall in line with final zoning.”

Opposition and Concerns

Councilman El Akuchie, a vocal opponent of allowing marijuana dispensaries in Mansfield, expressed his desire for more deliberation. “I am not really ready to vote on anything,” Akuchie stated. “If we can have two more readings before we vote, that would be my preference.”

Perry sought to alleviate Akuchie’s concerns by explaining state regulations requiring dispensaries to be a mile apart and 500 feet away from schools, churches, parks, and libraries. She assured him the city would recommend additional regulations.

Councilwoman Deb Mount, who introduced the bill, supported the motion to hold it to a first reading. “The administration has brought us a bill. They have said they would be prepared by the first meeting in August,” she said. “I don’t see what there is to discuss.”

Zader added that members could always amend the bill if further readings proved necessary.

Mayor Perry reassured the council that having a second reading would not delay the process for anyone looking to open a marijuana dispensary. “At the next meeting, you will absolutely have the initial zoning proposal,” she affirmed.

In a recent interview with the News Journal, Perry indicated that dispensaries would likely be zoned B-2, a classification for larger businesses that involves more stringent requirements.

As Mansfield continues to navigate the complexities of introducing marijuana dispensaries, the August 6 meeting promises to be a pivotal moment in determining the city’s stance and regulatory framework for this emerging industry.

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