

Nonprofit group No Pot in Niwot battles proposed marijuana grow farm

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Updated: 05/24/2015 05:49:26 PM MDT

TimesCall.com

Residents of Niwot opposed to a proposed marijuana grow farm and retail operation have ratcheted up their efforts, launching a nonprofit organization called No Pot in Niwot.

"Opening this recreational marijuana business in downtown Niwot simply doesn't fit with the small town, family oriented character of our community and the existing businesses in Cottonwood Park Square," said Kay Ingram, president of No Pot in Niwot.

The property at 6924 N. 79th Street is sandwiched between the Cottonwood Park Square shopping center and the Countryside Condos, within walking distance of downtown. It's owned by Ernie Craumer of Greenwich, Conn., who says he plans to move to the area.

The battle lines were drawn in March, when Craumer and his wife Callie appeared at a Niwot Business Association meeting to explain their plans. They were greeted outside by demonstrators along Second Street and inside by a hostile audience of business owners. Despite the overwhelming opposition demonstrated that evening, the Craumer's are moving forward with the application process.

Last week, the Boulder County Land Use Department mailed public notices to all property owners within 1,500 feet of the proposed pot facility location inviting comment.

The notices followed a finding by county staff that the required land use application from the Craumers was sufficiently complete for the required detailed review to move ahead.

Written comments are due to the Boulder County Land Use Department by Wednesday, June 17.

"We intend to submit hard facts to county decision makers documenting the objectionable odor, traffic, parking, safety and public health impacts, including accessibility to minors, which would result," Kay said. "Our focus is not on changing State law or County regulations, but on blocking this business in this location."

A survey last month by the Niwot Community Association showed 75 percent of respondents opposed the pot facility, 12 percent were neutral, and 12 percent in favor.

Despite the surveys and launching a non-profit opposed to the pot plan, Niwot residents have no legal power to prevent the project from moving forward.

"They can testify at hearings and write letters and let their thoughts be known. But ultimately it's the planning board and county commissioners," Liz Donaghey, the marijuana licensing authority for Boulder County, told the Times-Call in March.

That process, from application to county approval, usually takes four to six months for a marijuana grow operation, she said.

After getting through the Land Use Department, the process moves to the county planning commission, which will hold public hearings. After that it's on to the county commissioners, who make a decision on whether to approve or deny the application.

If approved, it's back to the Land Use Department who works with the applicant to complete all post approval conditions.

In addition, the county Board of Commissioners would have to amend the existing Cottonwood Park Square Special Use permit to allow the business.

Should all that happen, the property owners would submit an application to the state of Colorado to operate the business.

The entire process can take upwards of a year.

"County approval of a marijuana retail and grow business at this location is not a done deal," Kay said. "This Special Use Permit amendment is much more than a simple business zoning question due to the broader impacts on Cottonwood Park Square and the close proximity to residential neighborhoods. The people of Niwot can win this."

Attempts to reach property owner Ernie Craumer were unsuccessful. In March he told the Times-Call that despite the community opposition, "we are planning to move ahead with our real estate project."

More details on No Pot in Niwot and maps of the proposed pot farm location can be found online at www.preserveniwot.org.

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