

# Marijuana odor complaint raises stink in Holyoke

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HOLYOKE — Councilors and city planners are discussing marijuana odor mitigation measures in the wake of complaints about the smell from cannabis manufacturing facilities.

The city's Health Director and Building Commission appeared at a joint hearing Tuesday of the Planning Board and City Council Ordinance Committee. Discussion is slated to resume March 8.

Councilor Linda Vacon, who chairs the Ordinance Committee, said as the cannabis industry matures nationwide, the odor issue has garnered more attention. As a result, the councilor proposed attaching an odor control condition to future special permits.

She said the public has expressed concerns about odors, including John Aubin, owner of Open Square off Lyman Street. He contends he detected marijuana smells coming from nearby cannabis manufacturing facilities.

Aubin, who appeared via Zoom, said odor control and buffer zones had become national concerns.

He noted that Boston requires a buffer of 2,640 feet between existing marijuana establishments, including retailers, cultivators and manufacturers.

According to Aubin, while Denver, Colorado, has hundreds of manufacturers and retail shops, the city forbids cultivation or manufacturing in residential or mixed-use urban areas. Denver also imposes a buffer from schools and residential districts.

He said he spoke with a leading marijuana mitigation company that recommends installing ventilation systems and distancing such facilities from other uses to avoid odor complaints.

Aubin added that his staff texted him last week about detecting odors that are becoming more prevalent. He mentioned Trulieve at 56 Canal St. as a likely source. He said the science continues to evolve on marijuana detecting technology.

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Aubin recommended that Holyoke pursue funding for air quality devices and require marijuana facilities to install them. "The current Holyoke requirements are

basically up to the applicant,” he said, and that 100% odor mitigation was not possible.

Health Director Sean Gonsalves said the air quality monitors are calibrated for a certain level of fine particulates, a physical rather than a gas element. For example, the monitors can detect a particulate 30 times thinner than a human hair.

Councilor At-large Israel Rivera said the monitors could pick up a particulate unrelated to the marijuana industry.

“How do we differentiate from whether it’s marijuana or some other industry in the area we haven’t measured?” he said.

Gonsalves replied natural occurrences affect neighborhood air quality besides commercially derived pollutants.

“These sensors are not going to be able to differentiate between the admitters of particulate matter or other emissions,” Gonsalves said. “At this point, these (detectors) are here to get a better understanding of the conditions in the city and neighboring cities. They’re not going to point out a source.”

Ward 3 Councilor David Bartley said the odor control differed from monitoring the air quality.

“I don’t see how the air quality monitors get us to anything relative to the odor control issue,” he said. “If we’re going to deal with the odor control issue, we should stay focused on that.”

Bartley added the odor mitigation condition recognizes the monitoring technology was not advanced enough. “It gives us a little bit of leverage with these manufacturers,” he said.

Attorney James Valeriani, who represents two cannabis applicants, said what was happening in Boston, Denver or other locales was irrelevant.

“What’s in place now is sufficient to detect odor concerns in a plain language,” he said.

Valeriani cautioned the Ordinance Committee on the kinds of documents presented to them. The documents should be based on expert materials and consistent with state law.

“With all due respect, Mr. Aubin is an architect,” he said.

The city was sitting on a “boatload of money,” said Valeriani, adding the City Council could hire health and planning experts and outside consultants.