

**VILLAGE OF SPARTA
PLANNING COMMISSION
Regular Meeting
November 6, 2023 @ 7:00 PM
75 N. Union St. (Sparta Civic Center)**

Present: Chairmen Bob Liscombe, Commission members Jon Braybrook, Robert Carlstrom, Emilie Henry, Gary Moody, Christina Owens, and Robert Whalen.

Absent: Rose Frederick and Ryan Wolford.

Also present: Village Manager Jim Lower and Village Clerk Katy Shelton.

- 1) CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm.
- 2) ROLL CALL: Formal roll call was taken. Those in attendance/absent are noted above.
- 3) MINUTES:
 - a. Approve Regular Planning Commission Meeting Minutes of October 2, 2023. Motion by Moody with a second by Whalen to approve. Motion passed unanimously.
- 4) ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA – APPROVAL OF AGENDA: None. Motion by Whalen with a second by Carlstrom to approve. Motion passed unanimously.
- 5) PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS: None.
- 6) COMMUNICATIONS: None.
- 7) PUBLIC HEARING:
 - a. **25 Ida Red Special Land Use Permit Application Hearing:** Although this agenda item involves ONLY the special land use permit application, the overall issue concerns the proposed adult use marijuana retailer/dispensary by Baria Brothers LLC.
Public hearing opened at 7:01pm.
 1. Evelyn Champney, 46 Washington St, Sparta. She mentioned that the Village opposed this before and asked what has changed. Commissioner Whalen gave a brief history of when and why the Village put a moratorium on this issue after the State of Michigan approved it. Ms Champney stated that when this issue first came up, she was

against it because she hadn't educated herself on the subject. She now supports a marijuana dispensary in Sparta because of the monetary benefit it will give the Village. She also stated that she understands that there is a legitimate medical use for marijuana. She also mentioned that the dispensaries that she has seen in our area are all very professional and discrete looking offices.

2. Julie Sanford, 370 Nelson St, Sparta. She said that she is a behavioral health nurse and is very against a dispensary in Sparta. She believes that it sends the wrong message to our kids, and makes it look like the Village is endorsing marijuana usage. She believes that increased access to marijuana necessarily leads to increased use. She is also concerned about possible odors emanating from the building.
3. Joe Janga, 770 Harmony Place, Sparta. He emphasized the medical uses for marijuana and said that it can really help some people. He said that it would be good to have a dispensary in Sparta so that people can access the product locally. He thanked the Council for working on this issue.
4. Jim Merriman, 1506 12 Mile Rd, Sparta. He thinks it is a bad idea and reflects badly upon our Village. He said that there are over 20 dispensaries within 20 miles of Sparta and questioned why we need one here. He believes it gives easier access to kids and increases the temptation for kids to use it. He said that if adults really need marijuana for a medical reason, they can drive to another dispensary in Grant or Cedar Springs or Grand Rapids. He does not want to see one operating here.
5. Shannon Colby, Indian Lakes Rd, Sparta. She said that she grew up among people who used marijuana. She said that we need to educate people about it so that it can be used responsibly. She has no problem with a dispensary in Sparta. She stated that ANYTHING can be abused, and that kids will be able to obtain marijuana if they want it bad enough whether or not a dispensary is located in the Village.
6. Sam Colby, Indian Lake Rd, Sparta. He emphasized that marijuana dispensaries are very strict on only letting adults into their business. He said that anyone under the age of 21 can't even get through the door. He said that having a dispensary in the Village doesn't make kids use marijuana just as having a bar in the Village doesn't make people drink alcohol. He emphasized that the Village will receive a good amount of tax money once the dispensary starts operating. He said it's better that Sparta get that money rather than Cedar Springs or Grant or some other municipality.

Public hearing closed at 7:23pm.

8) NEW BUSINESS:

a. **25 Ida Red Special Land Use Permit Application:** Manut

Maninderpol Singh from Baria Brothers was present to discuss the proposed marijuana dispensary and answer any questions or concerns from the Commission members and members of the public. He stated that it's a very intensive process to get approved to get a license to operate a marijuana dispensary. He said that Grand Rapids is dominated by national companies and emphasized that he's a local businessman. He stated that all dispensaries must have an anteroom just inside the door to the business. That anteroom has no windows so that people cannot see into the business at all so that no products are visible at that location. Prospective customers must present their license or state ID and that license or state ID is run through a database to be sure it is a legitimate ID. He also said that Michigan has extremely strict regulations regarding filtration at dispensaries so that no odors emanate from the building. He also believes that his dispensary can conceivably provide 20-30 jobs for people.

It was mentioned that there was a recent post on the Sparta Communications Facebook page on this issue. Of the 60 plus comments, 55 were positive about having a dispensary in the Village.

It was also mentioned that all marijuana in Michigan has to come from approved processors so that it's a known product without any additives.

It was also mentioned that the marijuana in dispensaries is stored in a vault with five layers of metal to keep it odor free.

Commissioner Henry asked if any businesses have commented on this issue. Village Manager Lower said no.

Commissioner Whalen talked about the moratorium the Village put on this issue once the State legalized it. At that time, Village residents were overwhelmingly in support of having local marijuana dispensaries. He stated that the way the Village is handling it now is much better than if the issue had been raised as a ballot initiative. This way the Village has much more control over any marijuana businesses.

Commissioner Carlstrom stated that a legal dispensary here should reduce the market for illegal marijuana.

Commissioner Henry asked about proposed names for the dispensary. The business owner stated that he was considering something like “Peak” or “Zen”. He stated that it absolutely would not be a provocative name.

Resident Julie Sanford asked what the front of the proposed dispensary would look like. She was concerned that it might be too “flashy”. The Village Manager responded that the business would be subject to the same zoning regulations as any other business located in the Village. He also stated that the application from Baria Brothers met all the Village and State requirements.

Motion by Braybrook with a second by Moody to recommend approval to the Village Council. Motion passed unanimously. The Village Manager stated that there will be a vote on this issue at next week’s Council meeting.

9) UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

a. None.

10) PUBLIC COMMENT:

a. None.

11) VILLAGE MANAGER REPORT: Manager Lower said that this issue will be on the agenda at the next Village Council meeting. He said that if the Council approves it, then he as Village Manager will either approve or not approve the proposal. He also said that there will be a budget presentation at the next Council meeting. He also said that Code Enforcement officer Deb is back from her medical leave albeit on slightly reduced duties.

12) COMMISSION COMMENT: Commissioner Moody said he was glad that we were getting new and improved parking lots in the Village. It was stated that the new lot at Balyeat Field will be striped to accommodate large vehicles.

13) ADJOURNMENT: Meeting adjourned by Chairman Liscombe at 7:42pm.

Submitted by Katy Shelton, Village Clerk.

