

Salem pot meeting: Less regulation is more, hundreds say

The Oregon Liquor Control Commission used brightly colored stickers and green, red and yellow cards to gauge hundreds of people's opinions on how it should regulate recreational marijuana, which was passed by Oregon voters last November.

Top concerns that emerged in a packed conference room at the Chemeketa Eola Viticulture Center were related to banking, product testing and restrictions on future industry members. Salem's meeting was the third of 12 that the OLCC has planned statewide.

The majority in the room appeared to favor fewer restrictions except when they showed unanimous support for protecting children from marijuana.

The topics raised ranged widely, covering issues from advertising to whether medical marijuana dispensaries should also be able to sell recreational marijuana and whether nurseries should be able to sell small vegetative marijuana starts.

People applauded opinions just as readily as they loudly disagreed with others, sometimes creating a chaotic atmosphere.

One woman, who identified herself as a medical marijuana dispensary owner, said she should be able to also get in on the recreational marijuana market.

"The people who have been fighting for this should have the opportunity to sell recreational marijuana as well," she said. "We fought to make marijuana not such a scary thing. It's not heroin. It's a plant."

OLCC chairman Rob Patridge began the two-hour public meeting by presenting the basics of Measure 91, and what the aspects the OLCC has authority on, including taxation, licensing and regulation. It's possible that the OLCC could ask the Legislature to give it more tools, if deemed necessary.

"We're trying to get some ideas from you, some direction from you so that as we can tease out these key issues," Patridge said, "How we're going to attack those issues. How we're going to make things happen."

There seemed to be some apprehension about corporate growers taking over the Oregon market, reflecting a strong desire to keep the recreational industry about small, independent businesses.

One farmer complained that he was already seeing out-of-state businesses with lots of money buying up large plots of land. Another man, who had similar concerns, received a round of applause when he suggested only giving licenses to Oregon residents.

During the open mic portion of the evening, one man seemed to sum up the sentiments of many in the

room: "Try to think of ways that we can permit responsibly and safely, rather than look for ways to prohibit," he said.

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