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City News

From Councilwoman Jeanne Faatz

Pot dispensaries easing pain for some, causing it for others

When voters statewide approved the idea back in 2000, medical marijuana was supposed to offer relief for a small number of patients with debilitating diseases or severe pain. So it's more than a surprise that the vote has ignited a growth industry of dispensaries popping up like weeds.

As more and more patients scurry for state-issued cards and physicians' blessings, the State of Colorado is working to figure out how to define care givers and marijuana users. Denver, meanwhile, is wrestling with other aspects of the situation, which to some has gone to pot in a hurry.

The list of ways the city could regulate marijuana dispensaries is long. And many are likely to fuel debate even after council takes its first crack at new rules.

There are simply many vexing questions that surround the topic, including:

- Requiring appropriate business licenses and permits for dispensaries;
- Ensuring health rules for marijuana-infused food products;
- Handling background checks for dispensary owners and employees;
- Imposing distance rules to keep dispensaries out of residential neighborhoods and away from schools, day-care centers and one another;
- Banning on-site consumption of "product";
- Monitoring compliance and preventing abuse;
- Limiting dispensary hours of operation;
- Taxing retail sales, which the city began to do on December 1, 2009.

There is no doubt that medical marijuana has helped many individuals with severe pain or with side effects from, for instance, cancer drugs. Providing this aid was the spirit behind the decision by voters in all areas of Denver – including our council district – to approve the measure when it appeared on the statewide ballot. What has resulted is something else.