

City seeks input from tobacco retailers

May 12, 2023



After a grueling hour of debate, the city council kicked the can forward rather than vote to pass into ordinance a tobacco retail ordinance. Councilors gave direction to seek more input from eight remaining tobacco retailers vending products and to conduct a tobacco workshop.

Tobacco retailer Sabina Renner of RNS Oil, expressed her deep concern councilors did not fully understand the economic impact the loss of tobacco revenue would have on her business. Renner spoke at the public speaker microphone and urged the council to delay its vote before speaking to the eight tobacco retailers in the city.

“This is a big deal for our small business. We sell \$25,000 to \$40,000 per month in tobacco products,” Renner said.

Renner adheres to and embraces the strict controls the state imposes on her business.

“Placing another burden on our business would hurt retailers,” Renner stated.

Renner shared with the council her experiences in sting operations conducted by the state. She lamented, “regulators wait for your store to get busy and watch for an employee to fail to ID card a tobacco purchaser. I had to fire an employee over these sting operations. It’s not fair.”

The goal of the ordinance is to reduce the ratio of four retailers selling tobacco products per 2,500 residents to the state average of two retailers per 2500.

Councilors conceded two modifications to the proposed ordinance: the existing ordinance contained no transferability of the TRO; the administrative citation and 60-day suspension process would be more flexible. All councilors expressed an interest in making these changes to the ordinance.

After the Board of Supervisors passed the transferability of TRO’s. The city was seeking to mirror the county ordinance.

Amber Wier of NorCal for Health stated her efforts are educational only.

“Our goal is to minimize the tobacco norm,” she stated.

Councilor Kelly Shellong did not hide her revulsion of tobacco products and the harm tobacco products inflict on the public.

“I’d love to ban all tobacco within the city.”

She mused how she observed how her mother, a lifetime smoker, passed away from cancer.

Mayor Pro Tem Blake Inscore expressed his support for the TRO. “We need to get this right.” He supported moderating the citation process and urged his colleagues to send the item back to city staff.

Councilor Jason Greenough questioned what Inscore expects from city staff. Greenough rejected the entire regulatory process of onerous restrictions. “It’s the beginning of a brand-new regulatory structure and I don’t agree with this.” Greenough stated the process of tobacco misuse starts in the home.

Councilor Ray Altman was quiet until he wasn’t...and Altman exclaimed, “Why are we wasting time on this? I won’t support this (ordinance) tonight; I won’t vote for it in July. That’s my stance. It seems unfair allowing this favoritism toward marijuana and at the expense of tobacco. You can’t be fired for being loaded on marijuana.”

Shellong challenged councilor Altman. “...Vapes are killing children.”

“... low-down dirty adults are going to give kids junk. They should be ashamed of themselves,” he responded.

With Altman dissenting, the council instructed staff to conduct the workshop for retailers.