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## **Will marijuana-growing proposal pass the sniff test?**

It took some nosy Los Angeles police to sniff out 850 marijuana plants growing 25 feet behind their Canoga Park station.

Nine months later, some intrepid L.A. businessmen want to put the pot back – legally.

With medical marijuana allowed by law and voters set to decide in November whether to legalize all pot, the group of entrepreneurs aims to work with the city to create an above-board cannabis farm behind the Topanga Station.

"This will benefit Los Angeles 100 percent," said Daniel Jaimes, a partner with Plant Properties Management LLC, standing in the cavernous warehouse where hydroponic weed once grew.

"We're providing the city the ability to better regulate the (medical marijuana) industry from start to finish."

Plant Properties is negotiating with Los Angeles, Chico and other cities throughout California on ways to legally grow, regulate and tax medical marijuana.

Their model: Lease space to licensed growers, then test, package, track and secure the plants for healthier, safer and better-regulated medical pot. This, they say, would help clean up a willy-nilly medical pot industry that is operating with little government oversight.

Last month, the group met with a representative of City Councilman Dennis Zine to discuss the pot-growing proposal for 8411 Canoga Ave. Zine and Councilman Greig Smith said they are adamantly against the pot farm, which could offer up to 250,000 square feet for weed horticulture, testing and shipping.

However, Plant Properties has won support from David Honda, a contractor and San Fernando Award winner, whose Northridge company hopes to develop future sites.

Honda, a conservative Republican, called the business model well-orchestrated and potentially profitable for cities.

"Plant Properties Management is a new concept, for the safety of the patients, for quality of care," Honda said. "Here is an industry that is largely underground, untaxed.

"And they (PPM) want to be taxed. They want to stand up, like the donkey in 'Shrek,' and say, 'Pick me, pick me.'"

## **No sales on the site**

There would be no marijuana sales onsite, proponents said. Instead, they see the farm as an alternative to the growers and warehouses that now supply dispensaries across the state with illicit, untested or pesticide-ridden pot.

"We are not drug dealers," said Jason Oh, the other managing partner for the group. "We want to establish quality control. Right now it's a mess."

"We want to help California regulate the industry, with safe products, proper tracking, taxation and security."

Plant Properties hopes to persuade Los Angeles to follow the lead of Oakland, where the City Council voted last month to permit large-scale indoor marijuana plantations. Faced with a \$31 million budget deficit, Oakland hopes to collect as much as \$38 million a year in fees and taxes.

In 1996, California voters passed Proposition 215, which legalized the growth and possession of marijuana for medical purposes. In November, state voters will decide on Measure 19, which would legalize pot entirely, contrary to federal law.

Some L.A. officials, however, don't plan to budge on their opposition to the pot farm, despite potential tax revenues of more than \$1 million a year.

They also said it would violate current state law, barring the mass production of marijuana.

"I'm not supporting it in any way shape or form," said Zine, who hopped off his Harley in Beaver, Utah, for a phone interview to voice his objections. "These folks want to get in on the ground floor of legalizing pot sales.

"These folks who want this plantation, it's for the purpose of making money ... That's illegal in California, and I won't support it."

Smith, whose district contains the warehouse site, won't either. He's said he's seen kids walk into medical marijuana dispensaries while their mothers waited in the car.

"It's as dead as a mummy," Smith said of the proposal. "I don't know how it could be permitted ... I've always been opposed to the sale of marijuana for medical purposes."

The City Attorney's Office said that in order to facilitate a pot farm in Los Angeles, Plant Properties would have to organize as a pot-growing collective in accordance with California law, then obtain a city permit by lottery.

"These two gentlemen are going to have to conform their idea to current (state) law," Special Assistant City Attorney Jane Usher said, "which means collective cultivation by qualified patients and primary care givers."

## **'A brilliant business model'**

But Keven Acebo, a public policy adviser who supports the project, said that the business model would be legal in every way.

"It's brilliant on a lot of fronts because it answers a lot of problems cities have right now," he said. "You're not regulating from the back end, but regulating from the front end. It's a brilliant business model."

It was just before Thanksgiving that the LAPD Gang Impact Team whiffed evidence of pot coming from the warehouse in the alley behind their station.

Eric Prince, whose family had leased the building to filmmakers before unwittingly renting it to the pot growers – who were later charged with cultivation – said he'd be happy to see it filled again with plants.

"Evidently, I've had squiggly green things in here before, and there was no compensation for that," said Prince, whose lease would depend on a city permit. "And I'm willing to have them again."

"As long as it's legal."