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Sherman seeking residents' input on sales of cannabis

By **DAVID PRENATT**

editorial@westfieldrepublican.com

SHERMAN — Sherman area residents will soon have the opportunity to voice their opinion regarding the possibility of cannabis retail sales in the village.

After a public discussion session prior to their regular meeting on October 6, the Village Board of Trustees decided to send a survey to all residents. The questionnaire will be mailed this coming week with the water and sewer bills. However, village residency is not required for completion of the survey and trustees are seeking feedback from all stakeholders.

The survey asks the question: Should the village opt out of cannabis retail sales and on site consumption? The survey letter reminds residents that "cannabis possession and consumption was legal-

ized throughout New York State and marijuana is legal to be smoked in all areas where smoking tobacco is permissible." Furthermore, "municipalities cannot opt out of commercial growth and legal personal growth, possession and consumption."

Since each municipality must decide whether to allow retail dispensaries and on site consumption or opt out of allowing these activities, trustees are seeking input by means of the survey.

Several people attended the October 6 discussion to voice their opinions regarding the issue. Jennifer Tewinkle read a prepared statement in opposition to the opt-out law. She is in support of retail dispensaries to attract more business, and stimulate Sherman's small economy.

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Jim Mayshark added that it is about increasing traffic, in response to Jim Higginbotham's comment that the 3% excise tax the village would receive would be minimal, especially since the town can rescind its opt-out law and take half from the village, leaving the village with only 1.5% tax revenue from local sales.

Mel Swanson said that having a dispensary might open the door for more illegal sales which would offer lower prices than the dispensary.

"If people can legally grow it themselves and have it for their own use, why would they buy it at a dispensary?" he asked.

Jay Irwin, wastewater treatment chief operator, responded that marijuana is not a "drug-deal drug."

"I assume that the deal with marijuana is more a safety issue," Irwin said. "These are the things I look at — the safety, the regulations and the zoning."

Another resident added that the product from the dispensary will usually be of a higher quality and can be

purchased in many forms.

"It's not just smoking. There's a lot more to this, like edibles, lollipops, etc.," she said. "Smoking is probably about one third of it."

Village Clerk Jeanette Ramm said that most people who have come into the office have been supportive.

"No one has said they were against it," she said.

Sherman Mayor Colleen Meeder said she has had a lot of questions from the community.

"We're going to pull as much information as we can from everybody," she said. "We'll be doing this again in November."

Another woman in attendance stressed the need for education on the subject.

"So when people vote, they are voting for what they know, not what they fear," she said. "People might reach a negative decision because they don't have all of the information."

Trustee Kirk Ayers agreed with the need to educate the people.

"We make a lot of decisions based on what we think people want," he said.

It's necessary to get information to the people and find out their opinions, he said.

Meeder stressed that the reality of cannabis use is already prevalent. She said she was surprised when the village's code enforcement officer said he had attended the state fair and they were already advertising designated areas for smoking of marijuana.

"Our code enforcement officer said it was announced at the fair where marijuana smoking areas were," she said.

Trustees concluded that the best course of action was to mail a survey to residents. In addition to the question about opting out of retail sales and on site consumption, the survey says, "we ask that you not only make your selection, but we greatly encourage you to explain your position."