

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION  
CITY OF WATERTOWN  
September 11, 2023  
7:00 p.m.**

**Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith Presiding**

**Present:** Council Member Patrick J. Hickey  
Council Member Clifford G. Olney III  
Council Member Sarah V.C. Pierce  
Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero  
Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith

**Also Present:** Kenneth A. Mix, City Manager

**DISCUSSION**

**Marijuana Legalization and Potency**

Council Member Hickey presented Council with a handout introducing Dale Quigley, Deputy Coordinator of the National Marijuana Initiative (NMI) of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program within the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. Included in Mr. Quigley's extensive background is serving on the Rocky Mountain HIDTA in Denver, Colorado from 2011-2016 as Manager of Intelligence and later overseeing the training program. He has a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice and retired in January 2016 as Sergeant for the Aurora Police Department. He has worked extensively in drug enforcement and narcotic investigations, supervising drug units including a gang-based drug task force with the FBI. He speaks regularly at regional, national and international drug conferences on the impacts of drugs usage.

Included in Mr. Quigley's teleconference were Steven Jennings, Deputy Public Health Director, and Anita Seefried-Brown, Alliance for Better Communities Project Director.

Mr. Quigley provided Council with a short introduction of his experience and noted that he was invited to speak at the Work Session by Council Member Hickey and Ms. Seefried-Brown, whom he met at a conference. He noted his goal was to educate Council on some of the most current information and updates with the drug crisis and the legalization of marijuana so they could have a better understanding of the complexities of the issues.

He presented a slide show showing data from Colorado about current market trends, money and potency as well as highway safety, because they are all related to marijuana use. He stressed the importance of prevention and education to provide current evidence-based research findings. He spoke at great length about the legalization of marijuana, stating that legalization at the State level will automatically put the state in conflict with the Federal government. He pointed out that all the promises of commercial gains and increases in tax revenue over the past 10 years have yet to be seen. He expressed concern that when people are trying to sell the majority on a topic like legalizing marijuana, the first thing they do is throw data out there, commenting that the problem with data is that it can be spun in any direction to support many conflicting viewpoints. He reiterated his point that the public needs to be educated as to what the whole story really is. He informed Council about current market trends for marijuana dispensaries and noted that the real money is not in medical marijuana but instead in commercial adult use. He summarized the marketplace and tax revenue in Colorado from 2014- 2022 comparing adult use and medical sales, noting that in 2022, total sales were down 20.6 percent from 2021 and daily tax revenue

dropped from 1.2 million to \$863,309 a day. He noted this is still a large amount of money, but it will vary from state to state, and the outcomes can be quite different. He summarized the findings of the Marketplace Q422 Survey and expressed concern that most of the states that have legalized marijuana say that 75.6 percent of the industry is running on fumes.

Mr. Quigley discussed the various pros and cons of different product types and mentioned the convenience of edibles. He explained that edibles do not have an odor and, therefore, a student could eat them right in front of a teacher in class, or a driver could be pulled over by a policeman and not have that identifying smell to give them away. He expressed further concerns about the ease with which young people have been able to obtain edibles. Mr. Quigley talked at length about the mental health community and noted with great concern that the current age for people being admitted for treatment of addiction to marijuana is 12- to 17-year-olds. He informed Council that potency in marijuana has greatly increased from the marijuana of the 1960's or 1970's.

Mayor Smith thanked Mr. Quigley and said it was an excellent presentation.

Council Member Olney asked if the purpose of the program is to educate legislators or to turn back the clock on marijuana use.

Mr. Quigley said his purpose is information and education.

Council Member Olney expressed concern that the people in New York State who are distributing marijuana are not educated enough and, therefore, this has created a huge black market in the absence of dispensaries. He agreed with Mr. Quigley that education is imperative.

Council Member Hickey asked Mr. Quigley for advice on the situation with teens and stressed his concern with the fact that there have been overdoses in local schools.

Mayor Smith said that Mr. Quigley brought up some very good medical points and noted that people are not educated regarding certain important facts, such as that a teen's brain is not fully developed until their early 20s. He also stated that there is a high rate of pulmonary issues associated with marijuana smokers as well as an increased likelihood of respiratory conditions and COPD.

Council Member Pierce informed Council she was working in the State Senate when marijuana was legalized in New York State. She indicated that employers came to her office and expressed concern regarding employees being under the influence while operating heavy equipment. She asked if there has been any data recorded from concerned employers.

Mr. Quigley detailed a Colorado case where a man was hurt on the job and prescribed medical marijuana, which was only to be used during his off-time and not while at work. He stated that employers have a right to expect a safe work site that is free from drugs. He further noted that an employer is not required to provide a spot for people to use marijuana, adding this is a heavily debated topic in Colorado.

Council Member Ruggerio inquired about drug-sniffing K-9 units and noted the waste of resources involved with training and then untraining the dogs to find marijuana. She also expressed concerns about traffic fatalities. She asked Mr. Quigley if he was aware of any new laws being passed regarding military use of medical marijuana, noting that, currently, marijuana is not allowed on base.

Mr. Quigley indicated he is not aware of any new legislation regarding use within the military.

Mr. Quigley commented there is no one right answer to all the questions but, as a community, education is imperative, adding there are still so many things yet unknown.

Work session ended at 8:15pm.

*Margaret M. Puccia*  
Deputy City Clerk