

In brief

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Marijuana issue OK'd for Ann Arbor ballot

The Ann Arbor City Council approved the language for a ballot question to amend the charter to allow a medical marijuana initiative to go before voters.

The council voted 7-4 Monday in favor of it. Council Members Wendy Woods, D-5th Ward, Mike Reid, R-2nd Ward, Leigh Greden, D-3rd Ward, and Marcia Higgins, R-2nd Ward, voted against it.

Greden, an attorney, said the council had conflicting laws. One law stated that once an issue had enough signatures on a petition, it had to be put on the ballot. But he also said state and federal law didn't recognize legal use of marijuana for medicinal purposes.

"I believe the ordinance is unenforceable under state and federal law," Greden said.

Scio Township trustee Charles Ream led an effort in Ann Arbor to gather 7,000 signatures to place the initiative on the ballot.

The ballot languages reads: "A Proposed Amendment to the Charter of the City of Ann Arbor, Michigan, Section 16.2, to waive fines and all other costs upon proof that the defendant is recommended by a physician, practitioner or other qualified health professional to use or provide the marijuana or cannabis for medical treatment; to prohibit Ann Arbor police officers, and his or her agents, from complaining, and the city attorney from refereeing any complaint, of the possession, control, use, giving away, sale or cultivation of marijuana or cannabis upon proof of an aforementioned recommendation; to change the fine for third and subsequent offenses from not less than \$100 to \$100; to establish an affirmative defense; and to prohibit imposition of other punitive or rehabilitative measures."

Council approves deal with firefighters

The Ann Arbor City Council approved the collective bargaining agreement between the city and the Local 693 International Association of Firefighters by an 11-0 vote Monday.

For years, the firefighters union and City Council have feuded over how the department should be run. That ended recently with the new contract, which was ratified by the union by a 79-3 vote.

"It is like a breath of fresh air," said City Council Member Wendy Woods, D-5th Ward.

The old contract expired June 30, 2002. The new two-year contract approved Monday has now also expired June 30, 2004, but the department now must abide by the new deal until the next contract is approved. Negotiations start in about 30 days. But both sides have said the new trust that has been developed between negotiating teams will make future contract talks much more productive.

Safety Services Manager Dan Oates said last week that the city got key concessions from the union in staffing, promotions and work schedule flexibility at the Fire Department. Among the provisions for firefighters, the city will make a one-time payment of \$1,000 to its 99 union members. The agreement also staves off layoffs in the Fire Department until at least June 2006.

City Council Member Chris Easthope, D-5th Ward, said the final bargaining session for the new contract lasted 22 hours.

Detour continues for Mt. Hope Road bridge

The Mt. Hope Road bridge over I-94 in eastern Jackson County will remain closed with traffic detoured until the end of this week or early next week, according to Michigan Department of Transportation spokeswoman Kari Arend. The bridge, which is undergoing repairs, had been expected to open Monday.

The Wagner Road bridge over I-94 was to open this morning, and the Kalmbach Road bridge over I-94 was already open this morning, Arend said. The three bridges are part of a summer-long project to repair and rehabilitate 22 bridges in 17 locations on I-94 between US-23 and Mt. Hope Road.

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