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More Regulation in the Works for Massage Parlors

By Cathy Tyson



Photo Cathy Tyson

The new guidelines should discourage the alleged shadier side of local massage establishments. Although a draft ordinance was presented at the April 23 City Council meeting, some fine tuning of the language is needed before a final version is adopted. Questions linger about massage therapist house calls and unique legitimate business that may fall into a gray area. The Stillpoint Center, an integrative health center run by Michael Anne Conley, offers a variety of healing services from a number of providers. "We want to comply with the essence and the intention of the ordinance, but want our concerns to be heard," said Conley.

California already has regulations governing massage businesses, and so do select cities throughout the state. The California Massage Therapy Council (CAMTC) was formed in 2008 to certify massage practitioners. At least 250 hours of training are required to be a Certified Massage Practitioner and 500 for a Certified Massage Therapist. Fingerprints, a passport photo, a state ID and a fee are also required in addition to a background check that looks for potential criminal history.

The proposed Lafayette ordinance will require owners of massage businesses to present the state certification for each employee or independent contractor who works there, and to maintain certain minimum health and safety standards, and provided contact information to the police. Once the ordinance is adopted, massage businesses will have 30 days to submit documentation, or face penalties.

Niroop Srivatsa, Planning and Building Services Manager, thanked intern Mary Fitzpatrick for her hard work putting together the ordinance. "It couldn't have been prepared so quickly without her invaluable assistance." Fitzpatrick's a UC Berkeley graduate student in Public Policy.

Srivatsa explained the goal of the ordinance is not to prohibit legitimate practitioners, but to keep track of the massage businesses in town. Since this is a new program, and the plan is to work with the police department and with the businesses to ensure practitioners are certified, "it won't happen overnight," she said.

Compliments were doled out from thankful residents. "This will go a long way to separate sleazy sex for sale from legitimate establishments," said one gentleman.

"This seems reasonable and makes sense," commented Traci Reilly.

With 19 massage parlors in this small city and neighbors getting increasingly frustrated at suspected illegal activity, staff from the City of Lafayette -with input from the police department -stepped up to the plate to assemble a draft ordinance to govern the operation of massage parlors.

The draft ordinance, once finalized and adopted, will require all massage therapists and practitioners operating within Lafayette to be state-certified and force all massage businesses to register with the city on an annual basis and post their certificates of registration in visible locations. Those with existing licenses for therapy like chiropractors, orthopedists, and physical therapists are specifically exempted.

Currently massage parlors fall into the general "personal services category" that are permitted to operate in Lafayette's commercial district. The alleged services rendered, at least according to several websites, spell out in graphic detail exactly how personal those services are.

"We don't want to be punitive to legitimate businesses, but also don't want illegal activity," said Code Enforcement Officer Mark Robbins.

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