

have been using rental houses in Monument, and all over El Paso County, to grow marijuana in huge quantities. State law authorizes the growing or processing of marijuana plants for use by patients, caregivers, or for personal medical or recreational consumption. However, criminals are taking advantage of the wording of the law to grow up to 500 plants in one house, with the intent of selling the marijuana on the black market, Shirk said.

He mentioned public safety issues generated by huge marijuana "grow operations," including:

- Unlicensed and unsafe modifications to structural, electrical and plumbing systems
- Noxious odors
- Excessive water consumption
- Unsafe storage and disposal of pesticides and chemicals
- Undue traffic generated in neighborhoods



Above: On Jan. 19, the Monument Board of Trustees discussed a new town ordinance regarding the personal cultivation of marijuana and the need for higher water rates for Monument water customers, since the town has been selling water for less than it costs to produce. The board continued the water rates discussion to the next regular board meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 16, since the Feb. 1 meeting was canceled. Pictured left to right: Trustees John Howe and Jeff Smith, Mayor Pro-Tem Jeff Kaiser, Mayor Dominguez, Trustees Becki Tooley, Kelly Elliott, and Jeff Bornstein, PRHS student council representative Kailee Tharnish, Town Attorney Gary Shupp, and Town Manager Chris Lowe. *Photo by Lisa Hatfield.*

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Financial Assistance available to those who qualify.

- Very high remediation costs to clean residences after grow operation leaves
 - Dangers of explosions from volatile solvents
- Shirk said that since what the "grow houses" were doing was not technically illegal, Monument police "could not do anything" when neighbors complained. However, when the revised town ordinance takes effect Feb. 19, that will change, he warned.

Aspects of the ordinance include:

- No more than 12 marijuana plants can be grown in a single primary residence, with half or fewer being mature, regardless of the number of patients, caregivers, or persons over 21 years old.
- Marijuana growing cannot be perceptible from outside the home or made evident by signs, noxious odors, excessive lighting, or undue vehicle traffic.
- No volatile solvents may be used in the extraction of THC or other cannabinoids.
- Monument Municipal Court now has the authority to issue a search warrant.

Low: The days of cheap water are gone

As they had two weeks before, town staff explained how both water base rates and volumetric rates must increase so that the town's water enterprise fund can become solvent again. See related Jan. 4 Board of Trustees article on page 1 for that iteration of financial details.

Low said that Tharnish told him the last substantial water rates increase was in 1996. However, when OCN reported on the Feb. 19, 2013 board meeting, Tharnish stated that the last Town of Monument water rate increase before 2013 was in 1998. In 2013, he also said that the town's water enterprise fund was not self-sufficient and that the new water rates he was proposing were probably high enough to restore the fund's self-sufficiency for up to

three years. See www.ocn.me/v13n3.htm#bot0219.

One month later, on March 11, 2013, Tharnish advised the board that the proposed water rates increase would not create enough additional revenue to cover all 2013 town water enterprise fund expenses because implementation had been delayed past the original planned starting date. He told the trustees that rates would need to be revisited "in about two to 2-1/2 years." Tharnish added that the costs of infrastructure issues might shorten that interval. See www.ocn.me/v13n4.htm#bot0311.

It was in 2013 that the town started to transfer money from the general fund to the water enterprise fund, Town Treasurer Pamela Smith told the board on Jan. 19. About \$400,000 has been transferred since 2013. Lowe's back-of-the-envelope estimate was that the water enterprise fund was "leaking a minimum of \$100,000 a year," in the last few years.

Note: Past Monument town managers have included: Rick Sonnenburg, about 2001 to 2005; Cathy Green, 2005 to January 2013. Pamela Smith, February 2013 to October 2015; Chris Lowe, 2015 - present. Smith has also been town treasurer since 2005.

Lowe's comments included:

- The town went 20 years without substantially adjusting utility rates. This is not fair, equitable, or responsible, provides nothing for renewable water, and does nothing for encouraging water conservation.
- The board has been questioning me severely and significantly since the first of these rate structures was rolled out in October. I like that!
- This is an equitable rate structure. It is as benign as we can make it for those in the most vulnerable positions such as those on fixed incomes.
- We are not selling water to make money. Our profits are reinvested in our public utility and our community.
- One project that cannot be slowed down is the \$12 million water reuse plan built into this rate structure in the capital improvement plan. We lose money right now as water we own goes over the dam.
- The new base rates will cover 32 percent of operations costs the first year. The other 68 percent will be covered, hopefully, by the tiered volumetric rates on water people use.
- We will look it again every year to re-evaluate and

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