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Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids stopping short of decriminalizing psychedelic mushrooms, plants

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Grand Rapids leaders are stopping short of effectively decriminalizing the use, possession, growth and gifting of psychoactive plants and fungi. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

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UPDATE: The Grand Rapids City Commission has approved the resolution by a 5-2 vote.

GRAND RAPIDS, MI -- Grand Rapids leaders are stopping short of effectively decriminalizing the use, possession, growth and gifting of psychoactive plants and fungi.

The wording in the Grand Rapids resolution is less strong than the one approved earlier by Ann Arbor. Advocates in Grand Rapids pushed for something similar to the Ann Arbor change.

In a split 5-2 vote Tuesday morning, Sept. 28, Grand Rapids city commissioners gave initial approval to a resolution supporting the ongoing low prioritization of local law enforcement efforts against those using or possessing psychoactive plants and fungi classified as “entheogens.”

Unlike the resolution and change of city policy passed nearly a year ago by Ann Arbor, the Grand Rapids measure does not outline support or law enforcement deprioritization for those who plant, cultivate, purchase, transport or distribute entheogens.

Local advocacy group Decriminalize Nature Grand Rapids, which spearheaded the efforts to get a resolution from city leaders, had called for them to pass a resolution modeled on the one in Ann Arbor and a number of other cities involved in the national campaign which provides that breadth of deprioritization.

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The sale of entheogens, which includes psilocybin mushrooms, mescaline-containing cacti, ayahuasca and ibogaine, remains forbidden in Ann Arbor and would remain so under the Grand Rapids resolution. The plants and fungi remain illegal under state and federal law.

Decriminalize Nature GR had originally sought for Grand Rapids, like Ann Arbor, to declare the growing, possession, use and gifting of entheogens the city's lowest law enforcement priority and that no budgetary resources would be dedicated to investigation, detention, arrest or prosecution of them.

The Grand Rapids resolution states that local enforcement of laws around the possession and use of entheogens has not been a high priority and that "very little public funds" are directed toward proactively investigating and prosecuting those crimes. Further, the resolution states, the city commission "supports ongoing low prioritization" of enforcement efforts against use and possession law violations.

The resolution will now go back before the city commission at their 7 p.m. meeting Tuesday for a final vote.

Decriminalize Nature GR activists say non-addictive entheogens show promise in treating addiction, end-of-life anxiety and grief, Parkinson's disease and other neurodegenerative diseases, PTSD, depression and more. They may also encourage spiritual and personal growth.

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The Grand Rapids resolution states that “those seeking to improve their health and well-being through the use of entheogenic plants and fungi should have the freedom to explore these healing methods without risk of arrest and prosecution.”

“This reminds me of a conversation we had around this table about a decade ago when we talked about medical marijuana,” said Mayor Rosalynn Bliss. “I plan to support this today because I do believe there is a medicinal impact and it truly can have a significant impact on individuals with mental health conditions and medical ailments.”

Decriminalize Nature GR started their push for the resolution after the success of sister group Decriminalize Nature Ann Arbor, or DNA2, which got Ann Arbor city leaders to adopt the stronger resolution and policy change in September 2020. There are similar statewide and national movements.

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The two dissenting votes Tuesday morning were from Third Ward city commissioners Senita Lenear and Nathaniel Moody.

Lenear, citing the already low law enforcement attention on the offenses, said she doesn't see the resolution as a priority when thinking about what offenses the city should be decriminalizing.

In the last two or three years, she said, about six people in the city have been arrested for these offenses and that the practice of the police department is already to not arrest “in this instance.”

“Had it been a part of a larger package of decriminalization of different offenses in our city it probably would've been a little more palatable,” Lenear said.

While she appreciates the information shared by Decriminalize Nature GR, she said she also would've liked the city to hear from a public health institution on the potential medicinal benefits of entheogens, similar to when the city considered medical marijuana.

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"I think that there is a lot more work that needs to be done in educating the public," Lenear said. "And so I get concerned when the city, when the government makes a declaration to this magnitude and the outcome of that declaration potentially helping the public to think that we're supportive of something that we haven't necessarily had dialogue and research about."

The Grand Rapids resolution, if passed, would voice support for local, state and federal legislative efforts to decriminalizes entheogenic plants and fungi.

In Ann Arbor, that meant specifically calling on the Washtenaw County Prosecuting Attorney to cease prosecution of people involved in the use of entheogens. Washtenaw County Prosecutor Eli Savit later adopted a policy declaring his office would no longer prosecute cases of those using, growing or possessing entheogens.

The Grand Rapids resolution does not call on Kent County Prosecutor Chris Becker to take any action.

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