

Proposed pot processing plant ousting Oak Harbor businesses

by ERIC WILKINSON / KING 5 News

NWCN.com | Posted on May 22, 2014

OAK HARBOR, Wash.— Mark Calim has been building his auto repair shop for 10 years. Grease runs in his family's blood. His favorite part of the job, though, is helping people in need.

"It's just what you do," he said.

Soon, however, Calin could find himself in the same situation.

"We got the letter last week," he said. "It's pretty cut and dry."

That's an interesting choice of words considering a major marijuana processing facility is planning to take over the property he leases, cutting and drying pot plants. Calim was told by the new owners to pay a 300% increase in rent or move out by July 1.

"They haven't given us any time to even think about it. It's do this or else," he said.

Half a dozen small businesses in the aging commercial development just north of Oak Harbor are in the same situation. Among them is the non-profit "Garage of Blessings." It's 3,600 square feet of clothing, furniture, toys and other assortments that are given away for free to some 1,500 needy people every month. Founder Kristiina Miller started hearing stories and called the property manager.

"I said, 'So...is there anything you want to tell me?'" she said.

Miller says she has to move, as well, and worries she won't be able to find another property that can suit the charity's unique needs.

"I don't know where we're going. I don't know when we're going. I have no idea. I have no answers," said Miller.

Other businesses leasing from the new property owners are in limbo right now as well, not knowing what will happen when their leases are up.

"We've been here for 13 years," said Chantelle Dawson, a waitress at Arirang Garden Koren Restaurant. "It's very uncomfortable. The owners want to stay here. They don't want to be pushed out. They don't

want to go anywhere.”

Calls to the property owners for comment were not returned Thursday.