

John Long

From: audrey <audrey@hothouseolyoke.com>
Sent: Thursday, November 01, 2018 11:59 AM
To: Board of Aldermen
Cc: Mayor; COS-Website-Planning; City Clerk Contact
Subject: Proposed Marijuana Ordinance

Dear Board of Aldermen:

My name is Audrey Park. I am a founder of a craft edibles kitchen called Hothouse Holyoke and a participant of the Sira Accelerator program. I recently came across a letter from Eric Schwartz, founder of Farm Bug Co-op, addressing the equity issue in Somerville and felt compelled to address some of the points made.

The spirit of Mr. Schwartz's proposal is commendable, but I believe it misses the mark when it comes to creating an industry that promotes sustainable equity in Somerville.

Mr. Schwartz makes several points that I would like to briefly address.

1. He states that "to date the medical marijuana industry in the state of Massachusetts has been dominated by vertically integrated RMDs."
 - a. This statement echoes a common mischaracterization of the cannabis industry in Massachusetts in general, and Somerville in particular. The reason RMDs are vertically integrated is that this is a regulatory requirement mandated by the Department of Public Health. It doesn't necessarily mean that these organizations are giant, faceless entities as some have suggested. The RMD that I have come to know in Somerville (Sira Naturals) is anything but a "dominating" corporation. Sira is a collection of very sincere, hard-working people who are dedicated to the spirit of the emerging cannabis industry, including a commitment to local sourcing and economic empowerment.
 - b. Schwartz goes on to state that "these corporations have done little to encourage small business participation in the industry."
 - a. This blanket statement is unfair to companies like Sira who are aggressively tackling the issue through creative programs like the Sira Accelerator, which will boost the early industry with craft businesses owned by minorities and equity applicants. Not all RMDs are the same. While some are just focused on the bottom line, others like Sira are committed to creating a diverse industry.
 - b. Mr. Schwartz's proposal suggests removing existing RMDs from priority status and excluding them from the Adult-Use market for one year. This could potentially be an effective measure IF there were a large pool of equity applicants. While there are 120-odd companies and individuals who have been "certified" by the Cannabis Control Commission as economic empowerment applicants, currently only three of those economic empowerment applicants have submitted complete applications for licensure in the entire state. There are currently zero cooperative applications submitted in the entire state. Under this proposal, there just wouldn't be an industry in Year 1 since there isn't a long line of equity applicants who are ready to submit for licensure to the state. Economic empowerment applicants need resources and/or active guidance to realistically enter this industry. This is exactly the kind of assistance provided by groups like Sira.

We can't keep big businesses from joining the industry, but we *can* strive to create high expectations and build a system for accountability.

In this industry, big businesses are frequently seen as the "bad guys." As a former 4th grade teacher in a low-performing school, I've had my share of "troublemakers". Many teachers chose to write off these kids. Some teachers even hoped

they got expelled to make their job easier. Personally, I found success applying couple strategies to combat this on-going issue:

- 1) Positively framed communication—creating a positive tone and culture where we are all on the same team.
- 2) Increased accountability—setting high expectations and manageable benchmarks.

A shift in tone and approach, unnatural as it initially seemed, proved to be a more effective long term solution. Many teachers unfortunately resort to using force and threats in hopes to control difficult students, but that never brings true resolution. Regulating a harmonious classroom is no small feat, and I can only imagine the difficulty and complexity in regulating a fair cannabis industry in Somerville. A mantra I spoke to myself regularly in the classroom was “purpose not power”. I hope it could also lend itself useful to the Board while navigating this complicated issue. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Audrey Park

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