

John Long

From: audrey <audrey@hothouseolyoke.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 23, 2018 11:50 AM
To: Board of Aldermen
Cc: City Clerk Contact; COS-Website-Planning; Mayor
Subject: Proposed Marijuana Ordinance

Dear Board of Aldermen:

My name is Audrey Park, founder of a craft edibles kitchen called Hothouse Holyoke. We were recently selected to be part of the Sira Accelerator, a program assisting craft cannabis startups. I'm writing to express my views on the proposed adult-use marijuana ordinance in Somerville.

After viewing some of the recent meetings, it is clear that promoting equity in the local licensing process is an important mission for the Board. I have a lot of respect for the Board's progressive approach and hope other towns and states will follow suit.

One idea mentioned was to exclude RMDs from priority applications. I applaud the intentions of the suggestion and initially agreed with the idea as it seemed like the simple and obvious solution. This is clearly a complicated topic that needs to be thoughtfully addressed in order to successfully and enthusiastically promote true equity in this industry. The opportunity gap for smaller players and minorities is an intricate issue, and won't be solved by temporarily excluding existing RMDs for a given time. There may be more constructive ways to approach this issue by finding creative solutions that work *with* RMDs and their resources, which could yield a much more positive, win/win situation.

Sira Naturals is undoubtedly promoting diversity and equity through the Sira Accelerator. Our edibles startup, Hothouse Holyoke, is one of three companies currently in the program. Sira provides us access to things like cannabis oil and commercial equipment as well as assistance in bringing our product to market much quicker than we could on our own. Most importantly, we are working with an established company, receiving personal mentorship in a space that gravely lacks guidance. Small businesses pioneering the emerging industry with limited start up capital can't survive costly mistakes. Industry guidance is desperately needed. Existing RMDs have experience and knowledge in establishing a compliant operation, and there is a plethora of passionate cannabis would-be entrepreneurs with fresh perspectives and creative products. I'd like to see a harmonious and sustainable ecosystem for cannabis businesses, and I believe aiming to find creative solutions that keeps both parties' interests aligned could set a new precedent for the industry.

The Cannabis Control Commission put great effort into building avenues for individuals disproportionately impacted by the enforcement of marijuana prohibition. However, the lack of participation from potential equity applicants shows that it isn't enough to solely create inclusive regulations. Information is powerful, but it doesn't directly translate into execution. Through my personal experiences, I firmly believe mentorship is the key to bridging the opportunity gap in education and all industries, especially the cannabis industry. Mentors can relay key knowledge and understanding in a given industry which can produce rapid growth, and rapid growth is what is needed to catch up smaller players for an even playing field.

As a pioneering microbusiness in Holyoke, I have sought out startup incubators and accelerators to no avail and wishfully professed my desire for mentorship programs in the cannabis space, similar to those typically found in the tech space. I was clearly shocked coming across the Sira Accelerator Program, it felt like a strange manifestation of my desires. People want to enter the industry, they see that they have been given a path, but active guidance is the key to realizing an equitable industry. It's no wonder Sira received over 400 applicants. They have provided real solutions to real problems and determined a route for a big business to mutually work with smaller businesses. There is a lot of talk

on building an equitable industry, but we are personally experiencing it and witnessing it working with Mike Dundas and the Sira Accelerator team. It feels exciting and hopeful if this is the direction of the industry. RMDs and larger marijuana companies should be held tightly accountable to equitable business practices, and towns have a wonderful opportunity to create regulations that can govern a fair industry. While Sira is a big business, they've taken a huge step in modeling how a larger corporation could collaboratively work with smaller companies, using their resources to boost the new industry with diverse, craft businesses. I commend Sira's boldness in pioneering this issue in a creative manner and believe larger companies actively tackling this issue should be regarded by towns to set the tone for other RMDs or big businesses looking to set up shop.

I have no doubt that the Board's cautious handling of this issue will yield a final decision that will promote a diverse cannabis landscape in Somerville. Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Audrey Park
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