

**Welcome to North Park's special meeting to talk about cannabis storefronts in our neighbourhood.**

We have one hour together, and all of you are welcome to stay for our regular monthly meeting afterwards. The format for this meeting is as follows: I will begin with a 10 minute background presentation, then you will have an opportunity to ask questions and give feedback. We are grateful to have representatives from the City and the Victoria Police Department here that can help answer any questions you might have.

If at the end of this neighbourhood conversation we have some agreement on a neighbourhood position or preference, we have until June 15 to share these with City Council. Council has indicated that they will consider North Park's views they deliberate each rezoning application.

So off we go with a bit of background. The purpose of tonight's meeting is not to discuss the legality of cannabis. Instead our task is to consider the optimal concentration and location of cannabis storefronts in North Park. This is the first time we've had a chance to discuss cannabis storefronts since they started popping up in our neighbourhood several years ago and it is wonderful to have a chance to talk about them from a 'big picture' perspective.

In 2015 we conducted a placebranding exercise where residents and businesses helped shape a vision for our neighbourhood – one of economic and cultural diversity, affordable spaces to live and work in, and eclectic small businesses and services. So our other task is to discuss whether the current concentration of cannabis storefronts supports or takes away from our vision. Said another way? Do we like it how it is now? Or do we want less monoculture and more diversity - more opportunities for more kinds of stores to take advantage of our cheaper rents?

Of course we are pondering these questions in unusual circumstances. Right now we have a dozen or so storefronts in our neighbourhood or within a 200m buffer of our neighbourhood, and about 35 or 38 in total in Victoria.

Probably so many opened in North Park because we have affordable rents and are close to downtown and also central in the region. No other municipality in the Capital Region allows dispensaries to operate. They are waiting for the Federal and Provincial Regulations to come out in a few years, and some may decide never to allow them.

Anyhow, as mentioned, we have about a dozen in North Park and within 200 metres of our boundary. The City's new medicinal cannabis regulation relies on this 200m buffer as a guideline to determine which existing storefronts can be licensed and allowed to stay where they are and

which must go or move elsewhere. The buffer means 200m between other cannabis storefronts and between schools.

But a recent staff report indicates that storefronts that are closer together than 200m will be considered, in particular if they are on separate blocks.

If we simply allow the City's process to unfold as it is outlined in their medicinal cannabis regulations, we may not see any change to the number of storefronts in our neighbourhood, and in fact the number may increase. An important unknown here is whether any existing storefront can actually be shut down.

Vancouver has had similar cannabis regulations in place for 2 years. In that time they have licensed 10 storefronts, and have 75 others operating without permission and without any ability to shut them down.

As in Victoria, non-compliant storefronts are being fined hundreds or thousands of dollars - sometimes daily - depending on the nature of the infraction (e.g. signage violation, lack of sufficient security or air purification), but these fines don't seem to be a sufficient penalty to compel them to shut themselves down.

It is important to note that Vancouver's guidelines are more robust than Victoria's with a recommendation of at least a 300m buffer, with the suggestion that the buffer should be closer to 1000m between storefronts and schools, community centres and other storefronts.

The 1000m buffer is also what is used for private liquor stores, which is why we only have 1 in North Park. Probably a similar buffer will be put in place when the Federal and Provincial governments implement their cannabis regulations and policies in a few years, but it is unclear whether existing storefronts could be grandfathered – meaning the number we have when these new regs and policies come into force may be the number we have in perpetuity.

Also, the City of Victoria's regulations are specific to medicinal cannabis. It is widely believed that the Federal and Provincial governments will insist that medicinal cannabis be dispensed from pharmacies or liquor stores. It is also widely believed that any private storefront that received rezoning and licensing under the City's current regulations will transition to a recreational cannabis storefront.

We may not get an opportunity to discuss whether we feel differently about recreational storefronts in terms of concentration in our neighbourhood. Last year's public consultation at City Hall was focused on medicinal cannabis.

With so many unknowns, it is useful to see what other jurisdictions are doing, and to explore evidence-based research.

Some jurisdictions have established thresholds or caps, and have grounded these in research studies that balance personal use and demand with an understanding of the public health impacts of increased access to psychoactive substances.

The City of Vancouver does not have a cap or density threshold per se, but it worked extensively with their public health partners to develop their guidelines. They have stated their density will be greater than Seattle Washington, and it current stands at 1 storefront per 7,000 people. Washington State's cap is 555 storefronts and their density ceiling or maximum is set at 1:13,000. Colorado's density maximum is set at 1:6,500. By way of comparison, liquor store density ratios anecdotally range from 1:1,000 to 1:3,000 people in North America.

The City of Victoria's density is currently at about 1:2,000 and North Park's is 1:300. The City does not have a policy framework in place that might give us a sense as to how many they think are enough in a city of our size. Their medicinal cannabis guidelines contain a goal of avoiding "undesirable concentration" but provide no definition of what this means.

Also the City has not consulted Public Health officials to date. When asked why, the City says they are in the business of land use, not public health – a position that is counter to increasing recognition of the role a city plays in community health and wellness.

Finally, there is an emerging body of research that is exploring the question of density and population thresholds for cannabis similar to past explorations around alcohol. Early findings suggest overconcentration of cannabis storefronts creates problems for neighbourhoods already struggling with challenging social issues, and upsets the natural ecology of a neighbourhood. In many jurisdictions, researchers are finding a trend where affluent neighbourhoods are in favour of locating storefronts in adjacent less-affluent neighbourhoods. Best practice suggests an even distribution of cannabis storefronts throughout a city or region. This conclusion was echoed earlier this week in my conversation with Dr Richard Stanwick, Island Health's Chief Medical Health Officer.

## Made in North Park? Our own guidelines on medicinal cannabis density and location

City Council has indicated it will pay attention to North Park's perspective as it deals with rezoning applications for the cannabis storefronts in North Park (we will still need to attend the public hearings if we want to make sure our guidelines are being considered!) Note: Council has also indicated they will approve the Cormorant storefront (Compassion Club) no matter what we say – so we are guaranteed to have at least 1 licensed storefront in our 'hood.

### OPTIONS

1. Do you want the North Park Neighbourhood Association to develop and submit guidelines to the City based on input from tonight's meeting? Y / N (circle one)
2. If you answered yes, do you want North Park's guidelines to include a limit to the number of storefronts? If so, indicate your preferred number below. If you answered no to question #1, skip to question #4.
  - ( ) 1 cannabis storefront (Compassion Club on Cormorant) to be on par with our 1 liquor store, 1 pharmacy and 1 grocery store
  - ( ) 3 cannabis storefronts in keeping with the lowest alcohol density threshold of 1:1,000
  - ( ) 5 cannabis storefronts because we have 5 coffee shops!
  - ( ) No limit – let the market decide
  - ( ) Other: Please indicate your preferred number and why (write comments on reverse)
3. Do you want North Park's guidelines to suggest preferred locations?
  - ( ) In major commercial areas (i.e. village centres)
  - ( ) On quieter side streets
  - ( ) Other considerations: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you want to ask the City to apply a bigger buffer in North Park – recognizing the unusual situation of so many storefronts already operating in our neighbourhood (we are not starting with a clean slate!)
  - ( ) 400m buffer to reduce the number of storefronts to 3 or 4
  - ( ) 600m buffer to split the difference between 200m and 1000m
  - ( ) 1000 m buffer to reduce the number of storefronts to 1 or 2
  - ( ) Other: Please indicate your preferred buffer and why (write comments on reverse)
5. Do you want us to explore a different tool to manage density?

The City says they are using the rezoning tool to allow for public input. But rezoning may also make it harder in the future to shut down unapproved storefronts. A 3-year temporary use permit buys time for the Fed/Prov regs to be put in place (these storefronts are operating anyway!) and could make it easier to shut down unapproved storefronts. Does this option interest you? Y / N (circle one)

