

SELECTBOARD SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2020

6:00 PM – REGULAR SESSION

TOWN HALL, 334 MAIN STREET

PRESENT

Selectboard Members:

Board Members Present: Steve Bannon/Chair, Ed Abrahams/Vice-Chair, Bill Cooke, Kate Burke, and Leigh Davis.

Also Present: Mark Pruhenski/Town Manager

Subject: Marijuana Public Forum

I. The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm.

II. The meeting was opened by Mr. Bannon at 6:00 PM and the statement listed at the bottom of the agenda was read aloud. Four people in attendance were recording the meeting.

III. Zoning for Marijuana Businesses in the Downtown Business District.

Mr. Bannon explained the agenda and the process for the public input session. It was noted that we currently have 5 signed host community agreements (HCA's) and that all of them would be grandfathered if changes to limits or zoning were suggested to move forward after tonight.

Mr. Bannon then opened the floor up to public input on item number 3- Zoning for Marijuana businesses in the downtown business district.

The first speaker was David Gilmore/115 Gas House Lane. Mr. Gilmore noted that he is hopeful a change in zoning would not impact or limit his property negatively since he is hoping to someday use this property for a small cultivation business.

Alex Sarbib/45 Van Deusenville Road. Mr. Sarbib questioned how the downtown business district is defined. He noted he believes we are a family and tourist oriented town, that location for retail marijuana is not a concern, and if it's located out of the downtown people will drive to it. Parking is a concern of his in downtown and he requests more info be placed on the town website.

Holly Hamer/Seekonk Cross Road. Ms. Hamer stated this is a moral issue and she's unsure what the real issue is? We should be welcoming the tax revenue and we do not put similar controls on alcohol. She stated it's expensive to do business in GB and that banks, law offices, and real estate offices are not good for downtown either. The market will level itself out over time.

Michelle Loubert/70 Division Street. Ms. Loubert stated that GB is a tourist town and was ranked the #1 small town in America. She is upset by the reputation that GB has acquired and noted an instance where GB was referred to as “marijuana town”.

Doug Stephenson/350 North Plain Road. Mr. Stephenson suggested we re-zone the Downtown Business District as a new zone and limit the number of cannabis businesses in the downtown district. He also stated it’s a destination business and it doesn’t matter where it’s located since customers will drive to it.

Maggie Bona/30 Reed Street. Ms. Bona noted that she lives near a marijuana business that will be opening soon and that’s it’s possible that retail marijuana and horseracing could both be in her neighborhood soon. She questioned how this will benefit the town.

Anne O’Dwyer/26 Kirk Street. Ms. O’Dwyer noted she is happy that the town is not unreasonably restrictive, but feels it is reasonable to control in some sense. Ms. O’Dwyer also worries that we are becoming the “marijuana capitol”.

Claus Bergman/89 Division Street. Mr. Bergman noted he was surprised that we don’t already have zoning in place for marijuana businesses. Mr. Abrahams quickly noted that zoning is in place already. Mr. Bergman recommended better zoning for cultivation.

With no other speakers stepping forward, Mr. Bannon moved the discussion to the Selectboard.

IV. Marijuana License Limits.

Ms. Burke questioned whether retail marijuana licenses could potentially have value if capped and stated that she thinks it could be treated like alcohol if it’s transferrable. She also noted that marijuana should be treated just as alcohol is in other ways. She questioned what the market will look like in the future and if retail should be limited in the downtown area of Housatonic as well.

Ms. Davis mentioned that it seemed like optics to her and that retail in the downtown area isn’t appropriate with families and kids congregating. She noted that common sense says it should not be in the downtown area and she is concerned about the cost of rent for other retailers. She then stated that we should let the market decide but put parameters in place. She also noted she is grateful for the tax money but concerned about our brand.

Mr. Cooke stated that we could limit like we do for package stores or the distance between stores. He also noted that there is no difference in his mind between a package store and a marijuana retail store.

Mr. Abrahams questioned where the retail shops will go if we push them out of the downtown area, and asked where we were pushing them to? He noted he is concerned about empty storefronts and also compared alcohol to marijuana, and noted that alcohol can be consumed on-site in several locations. He also mentioned that retail marijuana stores cannot advertise in the same manner and do not allow children in. He said that he would like answer to the following questions before the Town Meeting: how do limits impact the ability of an owner of an existing business to sell in their store and if we have more applicants than licenses, what criteria do we use to choose one over another?

Mr. Bannon also stated we need to look at where we are pushing the retailers to if we decide to control retail marijuana through zoning and that we have never banned other types of businesses in this same way. He noted that we need to think about the ramifications of this before moving forward.

Mr. Bannon then moved to item 4 on the agenda, Marijuana License Limits. Mr. Bannon opened the discussion on capping licenses and the conversation moved to the merits of this option. Mr. Abrahams

suggested that 10 seemed appropriate, Mr. Bannon said 7, Ms. Burke 7 (same as alcohol), and Ms. Davis also suggested 7, but that the remaining 2 should be reserved for disenfranchised owners.

V. Citizen Speak Time.

Mr. Bannon then opened the floor to public input again.

Maureen Quigley/9 High Street. Ms. Quigley noted that she does not like comparing marijuana to alcohol.

Betina Montano/Oak Street. Ms. Montano is concerned about Housatonic and noted there is lots of open and available space there. She is also concerned about the impact of legal marijuana on children.

After comments concluded, Ms. Davis made a motion to limit retail establishments to 7 and leave the remaining 2 for disenfranchised applicants and to define the same.

Ms. Burke seconded the motion for discussion.

Discussion- Ms. Burke noted she is concerned about how disenfranchised applicants would be defined and is not comfortable with how this has played out on the state level. After a brief discussion, Ms. Davis withdrew her motion and Ms. Burke withdrew her second.

Ms. Davis made a motion to limit the number of retail marijuana stores to 7. The motion was seconded by Ms. Burke and voted unanimously.

Mr. Pruhenski noted that staff would prepare a zoning amendment as such.

Mr. Bannon directed the discussion back to zoning for retail establishments in the downtown business district for the purpose of a vote.

Ms. Davis made a motion to exclude recreational marijuana establishments from the Business District with the exception of medical marijuana.

The motion did not receive a second and failed.

Mr. Cooke then made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Burke seconded, and the meeting concluded at 7:13 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark A. Pruhenski', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Mark A. Pruhenski