

Mayor Sets Out Guidelines for Medical Marijuana Facilities



In a letter to Massachusetts Department of Public Health Commissioner Bartlett, New Bedford Mayor Jon Mitchell shared his views on MassDPH's program for licensing medical marijuana facilities as it affects the City of New Bedford. The Mayor's letter comes after several months of meetings with applicants proposing facilities in the City, a personal tour of existing facilities in Rhode Island, and a careful evaluation of the costs and benefits.

"My job as Mayor is to put the overall interest of the City first and propose general parameters that are fair and balance the competing interests of neighbors, residents who want jobs, the marijuana facility developers, and those who want access to medical marijuana. This isn't about supporting or opposing various proposals that have been floated; it's about setting fair, reasonable boundaries that are appropriate for a large urban center with vulnerable neighborhoods and public safety challenges. My letter conveys to Commissioner Bartlett the

approach I believe works best for New Bedford, and I ask her to take that into account in the state's review of applications," said Mitchell.

The Mayor noted that, with modification or further detail, any of the four proposals that have been floated for facilities in the City could fall within the parameters he recommends, saying, "The conditions I've recommended to the Commissioner try to strike a balance among the interests of all parties."

In his letter the Mayor held open the possibility he would lend his support to a proposal that (1) restricted itself to a high-security production facility in the New Bedford Business Park (an exclusively industrial area), (2) found a location for its related dispensary(s) in retail area/s outside the City with good road and public transportation, and (3) negotiated a mitigation agreement with the community to offset the social impacts and the cost of municipal services.

Proposals that include a retail dispensary within the City do not fall within the Mayor's guidelines because the number of retail jobs typically generated would be miniscule while the risk of drug diversion in a dense urban setting is very high. The Mayor also discouraged MassDPH approval of multiple facilities in the City, citing "environmental justice" concerns that less affluent communities like New Bedford are unfairly targeted, and noting that multiple facilities would undermine the City's reputation. The law allows DPH to register up to five facilities in Bristol County. Presently, the state licensing process is in the application phase and the MassDPH has not yet awarded a license to any applicant.

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