

Lack of recreational marijuana sales will cause headaches for 2019 New Bedford incumbents

One of the biggest negative issues incumbent New Bedford city councilors and Mayor Mitchell will face in this year's election will be the lack of delivering a recreational marijuana store to New Bedford residents. The usual issues like potholes, high property taxes, and high crime will most certainly be an issue, but those will always be an issue.

At the time of this writing, 21 businesses have been given licenses to sell retail marijuana in Massachusetts by the Cannabis Control Commission. Locally, one recreational store is operating in nearby Wareham and three are already operating in Fall River with as many as 10 more hoping to be operating by the end of 2019.

There is little traction for a store in New Bedford because of the very **strict zoning** that the City Council and Mayor's office have imposed on any business hoping to operate in the city. It's crystal clear that places like Fall River want recreational stores in the city and New Bedford politicians do not. Last month, Whisk & JANE was denied a zoning variance to operate a recreational marijuana facility at the old strip club spot on Pope's Island.

For the first time, New Bedford will have a mayor's race that will allow the winner to serve a 4-year term. 2019 will also be the first time Mayor Mitchell will likely face some real competition since his first race in 2011 when State Representative Tony Cabral and City Councilor Linda Morad battled Mitchell for the vacant spot left by Scott Lang who

didn't seek re-election. Mitchell ran unopposed in 2013. He then ran against Maria Giesta in 2015 and Charlie Perry in 2017, but they weren't challengers with much of a chance of winning.

With a 4-year term that includes a salary of almost \$120,000 a year, I would expect plenty of people entering the race – who wouldn't want a 4 year, nearly half a million dollar contract? With two more years of higher taxes and the lack of a retail marijuana facility in the city, a strong opponent would have a lot to run on.

New Bedford City Councilors, especially the at-Large ones, generally have to die or retire to be replaced – unless you are Jon Saunders who voted to give himself a 44% pay raise and said, "If people don't like the job I'm doing, they can vote me out." He was voted out the following year.

I have a feeling with another year of **increasing property taxes** and the lack of recreational marijuana sales, the incumbent city councilors and the mayor will be vulnerable in this year's New Bedford elections. Even a usually apathetic New Bedford might decide enough is enough. If New Bedford doesn't see a recreational store by this summer, expect the natives to get restless and put up a fight at the ballot box in October and November.