

Retail cannabis? future in Aurora set to be decided January 21

By Brock Weir

The future of retail cannabis sales in Aurora will be decided on January 21, just hours before the Province's deadline for municipalities to say yes or no.

Council will spark the final discussion at a Special Council Meeting on Monday, January 21. The meeting comes after the last Council voted to ask staff for a report on the implications of opting out.

Recreational cannabis consumption was legalized nationwide on October 17. After the new laws came into effect, the Provincial Government announced plans to allow private cannabis retail stores to operate come April 1, 2019. The Province, however, has given municipalities the say on whether they would allow private stores to be located within their municipalities ? as long as they opt out by January 22.

Council will base its decision, in part, on a report put before them by Town Solicitor Patricia De Sario. The report does not make a specific recommendation to Council; rather it outlines the pros and cons each lawmaker will have to consider.

Among the first pros is the view private cannabis sales will ?bring a new sector of economic development opportunities? to Aurora. ?By permitting private cannabis retail stores, Council would be supporting small businesses and creating new jobs within the Town,? says Ms. De Sario. ?There would also be additional consumers from other communities that might not have otherwise come to Aurora.?

Increased funding, she adds, will also be available to municipalities that permit private cannabis retail sales: \$40 million over two years, distributed amongst all municipalities on a per-household basis, with each municipality receiving a minimum of \$5,000 to support costs relating to the legalization of cannabis.

?The Ministry has also stated that if Ontario's portion of the federal excise duty on recreational cannabis over the first two years of legalization exceeds \$100 million, the province will provide 50 per cent of the surplus only to municipalities who have not opted out as of January 22, 2019,? she says. Therefore, any municipality that does not permit private cannabis retail stores will not receive this further funding.?

Municipalities will have one chance only to opt out. Opting in is not a reversible decision, but municipalities who opt out by January 22 have the ability to opt in at a later date, she adds.

Should Council agree to allow retail cannabis sales in Aurora, officials will consider municipal and community input on where private retail locations will be located.

?The Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) is now accepting applications for a retail store authorization,? says Ms. De Sario. ?As part of the application process, the applicant is required to give notice of its application by posting a notice at the location of the proposed retail store location. Although the AGCO encourages the applicant to contact the municipality ahead of time, there is no legal obligation on the applicant to do so. The AGCO will provide notice of its applications on its website and Town Staff will be required to continuously monitor the website to be informed of any applications within the Town. Within 15 calendar days after notice is given, the Town, the Region or any resident?may make a written submission to AGCO. Anonymous submissions will not be accepted. The submission is limited to whether [the authorization of a location] is in the public interest and, for this purpose, matters of public interest pertain only to protecting public health and safety, protecting youth and restricting their access to cannabis, and preventing illicit activities in relation to cannabis.?

Restrictions are already in place requiring retail cannabis locations to have a minimum setback of 150 metres from schools, but this restriction does not apply to daycares, nurseries, colleges or universities, nor to places that are typically destinations for youth like parks and libraries.