Public Hearing Meeting Minutes
Municipal Office Complex - Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
February 2, 2022

Selectpeople Present: I. Haines: E. Dill; T. Govert

Also Present: Robert Casner; Mark Thiede; Dan Roczniak; Donovan Boynton; Erica Skoutas; Christopher Caron; Carol O'Hare; Erin & Larry Hermann; Patrick Miett; Robert Saraco; Shirley Caron; Jim Leatherbee; Dick Everett; Lynn Liska; Sue Costomaris; Alexis Vitali; Toni McCabe; Angie Jansky; Diana Zuckerman; Jay Moreau; Christopher Kurtin; Kim Dodge; Mike Anselmo; L. Zemienieski, and other members of the public via virtual media

First Selectman Haines opened the Public Hearing at 7:00 p.m.

Ms. Haines read the call that went out for the Hearing. She noted that a member of the public had requested the topic of creating an ordinance to ban retail sales of cannabis in East Haddam be added to a meeting agenda for the Board of Selectmen, which had been done, and the purpose of the Public Hearing was to obtain additional public input regarding the proposed ordinance. Ms. Haines reviewed the draft ordinance and stated it had been vetted by the Town's attorney. She provided information on how to electronically submit comments for the virtual attendees.

Ms. Haines opened the floor for comments from the public.

- Robert Casner – stated that he owns the package store in the 4-Corners section of Town and had received inquiries from his customers about the possibility of him also opening a retail cannabis establishment. He distributed materials regarding research that has been done on the sale/use of cannabis. He reviewed the findings of the research and noted that the studies refute the ideas that the establishment of retail dispensaries leads to increased crime in the area, an increase in teen use, or that cannabis is a gateway drug. He stated that he is interested in hearing the public's thoughts on having a dispensary in Town and it will determine whether or not he pursues his application before the Planning & Zoning Commission.

- Mark Thiede – stated that he is the owner of Two Wrasslin Cats and a supporter of the Town's youth, is on the local Prevention Council, and has been asked to serve on the Board of Directors of East Haddam's Youth & Family Services. He stated that he has a PhD in molecular biology and worked for 30-years in the pharma and bio-tech industry. He noted there are years of research that go into determining the long-term affects of a drug. He advised that he feels that should be considered before the Town moves forward to allow cannabis dispensaries to open in Town.

- Dan Roczniak – stated that cannabis has been a Schedule 1 drug for 50 years which made it very difficult for the scientific community to do studies of it. He stated that he has used marijuana for 30-years and, during that time, went to college in his 40's and got his teaching certificate. He stated that he does not believe cannabis is a gateway drug and feels that proper regulation will discourage its use by teens. Mr. Roczniak expressed his opinion that the proposed ordinance is too restrictive by prohibiting the growing and production aspects of the industry. He noted that the Town has the potential to benefit from tax revenues.

- Donovan Boynton – stated that he believes it is a good thing for the community and its youth to regulate marijuana so that there can be transparency and accountability about where it comes from. He noted that if the product is legal and people are going to travel distances to purchase it anyway, why shouldn't East Haddam benefit from such sales. He referenced studies done after the legalization of

cannabis in the states of Washington and Colorado that found that the presence of a dispensary did not impact teen use or abuse of the product and had no impact on road safety or the crime rate. He stated he feels the benefits of a having a local dispensary would not have a negative impact on the community but could, in fact, provide a benefit.

- Erica Skoutas – stated she is a certified prevention specialist and mental health professional who works with teens. She said that she is non-judgmental of adults who use medicinal marijuana but supports a ban on retail establishments in East Haddam because she feels it would signify a display of acceptance of the product. She noted that cannabis impacts judgement and is associated with mental health issues in the youth population. She referenced a CA study that linked the increase in retail cannabis establishments with increased use by local teens. She stated that she feels there will be numerous negative impacts to the community by allowing retail dispensaries.

- Christopher Caron – stated he experimented with marijuana in high school and that he feels this is another experiment. He advised that he does not object to medical marijuana but noted that he believes there were negative impacts to communities when recreational marijuana was legalized in Colorado. He stated he does not want to experiment with the Town's youth and does not feel there would be a benefit from allowing the sale of recreational marijuana in Town.

- Carol O'Hare – stated that she feels the use of recreational marijuana is a personal choice, however, she believes it impacts road safety and, therefore, she does not feel that the proposed location of Mr. Casner's dispensary is appropriate.

- Erin & Larry Hermann – Ms. Hermann stated that her 23-year-old son was killed in a head-on automobile collision because the driver of the other car was high on medicinal marijuana laced with PCP. She stated that allowing a retail dispensary in Town will make the roads here less safe and she strongly believes that it would have an overall negative impact on public safety. Mr. Hermann supported his wife's comments and stated that he vehemently objects to allowing any aspect of the cannabis industry in Town.

- Patrick Miett – suggested that the public can selectively cite studies that support their personal hypothesis; however, it has been his experience that most people who consume THC do it responsibly. He stated that he does not feel teen use of marijuana is a good thing but noted that even though the recreational use of cannabis has been legalized, sales to minors is still illegal. He acknowledged that there are risks associated with the use of cannabis, just as there are with alcohol which can also be abused, but stated that he believes the potential risks are the responsibility of those engaged in the use of both products. He stated that he feels alcohol is a more pernicious drug; however, sales of alcohol are not restricted. Mr. Miett said that he feels the recreational use of marijuana by adults should be a personal choice. Further, that he believes it is the parents' responsibility to instill proper values in their kids so that their behavior and/or choices are not based on whether there is or isn't a dispensary located in their town. He stated that he believes local residents who are also marijuana users would prefer to support their own community with the taxes generated through their purchase of cannabis.

- Robert Saraco – stated he is a 2nd year law student and a registered voter in Town. He stated that he does not support the proposed ordinance because he feels it represents the epitome of political hypocrisy. He stated that Ms. Haines' campaign promises were to encourage new businesses in Town and noted her involvement with the East Haddam Business Association which has a stated goal to support new and existing businesses in the community and to encourage citizens to shop locally. He stated he feels the proposed ordinance is unnecessary, arbitrary, and was generated by people who have a moral objection to the consumption of cannabis. He said that he feels the proposed ordinance is meant to restrict one business owner from engaging in a legal enterprise because they don't like the product and, further, that it is un-American and sets a dangerous precedent. He stated that he believes

the draft ordinance is hypocritical and nothing more than an imposition of the Board of Selectmen's arbitrary moral convictions on a single citizen.

- Shirley Caron – stated that sex toy stores and casinos are also legal but there is a difference between local, state, and federal policies which allows towns to have a choice about what is allowed locally. She stated that she believes many people chose to live in East Haddam for a certain quality of life and that allowing a dispensary to open with bring the Town down.

- Jim Leatherbee – stated he does not support the establishment of a cannabis dispensary in Town. He stated that those who want to use marijuana will find it but he would prefer to keep it at arm's length. He said he does not see how it can help the Town in any way.

- Dick Everett – stated that he moved to East Haddam because it had an antique house that he wanted to buy. He stated he feels that allowing a retail cannabis establishment here will send the message that East Haddam is not a quality town. He said that he believes people can already get the drug easily and he doesn't feel the potential tax revenues will make the Town any better.

- Lynn Liska – noted that when recreational marijuana was legalized in MA, CT people crossed the border to purchase it. She stated that advertising for the product, that could be observed by minors, is already prohibited by state regulation and, further, she likes the idea that there is some control over where the product is sold. She stated that she believes it is better if people who use cannabis purchase the product from a dispensary where they can be assured of what they are getting. She added that she feels it is parents' responsibility to educate their children about drugs and alcohol and noted, that the Planning and Zoning Commission can have an impact on the appearance of the proposed dispensary.

- Sue Costomaris – expressed her condolences to the Hermann's on the death of their son but pointed out that the PCP the other driver was high on is an illegal substance that is not available from a dispensary. She noted that illicit drugs and prescription opioids that teens become addicted to are a much bigger problem in Town than marijuana. She also stated that she owns an Air B&B and would much prefer to deal with people who use cannabis than those who use alcohol to excess. She noted that, besides generating tax revenues, the cannabis industry can also provide many needed jobs. Ms. Costomaris said that she does not believe marijuana is a gateway drug and objected to the proposed ordinance restricting growing and/or producing cannabis products in Town. She stated that the Town needs to remove the shame that is attached to the use of marijuana. She noted that there are a lot of cannabis growers in Town and the community should support its farmers.

- Alexis Vitali – stated that she supports bringing new businesses to Town but does not support allowing a dispensary in Town because she feels it does not represent the community's values. She noted studies of cannabis use in WA and CO show that traffic accidents increased significantly after the legalization of recreational marijuana; also, that there was an increase in crime because it is a cash business. She noted that the use of marijuana is still prohibited on a federal level so there is no oversight by the Food & Drug Administration resulting in contaminated product being sold to the public. She noted that several CT towns have allowed cannabis dispensaries and several have banned them. She suggested the increased expense for EMT, police and other public safety services in Town would outweigh any potential tax revenue benefit.

- Toni McCabe – stated that she is the Director of the East Haddam Youth & Family Services and thanked everyone for participating in the discussion. She stated that she has no objection to adults who choose to use medical or recreational marijuana; however, she feels increasing the presence of drugs or alcohol will result in increasing the accessibility of the products to teenagers. She noted that marijuana and alcohol are the drug of choice for the Town's high school students and 20% to 25% of them report regular use of same. She stated that the police have no way to scientifically detect if

someone is driving under the influence of cannabis. She stated that she believes the cannabis industry is mirroring the earlier days of the tobacco industry and feels the community doesn't yet have enough information about the long-term affects of legalized cannabis to move forward to allow a dispensary in Town. She agreed that legalizing cannabis is a social experiment and people can cherry-pick studies to support their personal hypothesis. She encouraged the public to educate themselves about the affects of cannabis use and to look at both sides of the research. She stated the community should make an informed decision and not an emotional one.

- Angie Jansky – stated she has experienced the negative consequences of alcoholism and other substance abuses in her family and it is her feeling that the Town already encourages the use of too much alcohol at some Town sponsored events such as Music on the River. She relayed a personal story where a friend of the family had been picked up by the state police for intoxication. She noted that, when she picked the individual up, the trooper she dealt with confided that if he had a choice of the public using alcohol or marijuana, he'd choose marijuana because of the anger issues associated with alcohol. She stated that her personal preference would be to eliminate both from society; however, if she had to choose, she feels cannabis is less destructive.

- Diana Zuckerman – stated she is strongly opposed to allowing a dispensary to open in Town. She stated she is a school counselor and teacher in another district and she feels that once the recreational use of cannabis was legalized in CT, she got much more pushback from adolescents in classroom discussions about the use of drugs. She stated she is not opposed to the medicinal use of cannabis but expressed her concern about the proposed location for the potential dispensary in Town.

- Jay Moreau – provided an overview of his professional background and stated that he worked as a part-time firefighter in East Haddam for 6 years. He stated that, during those 6 years, he saw more overdoses and drug-related problems than during the rest of his 31-year career. He stated that the Town has invested a lot of money and time acquiring and making improvements to its open space and referenced a proposed walking/bike path development. He noted that East Haddam is known for its outdoor recreational venues and he feels the sale of cannabis does not mix well with that. He stated that he was opposed to legalizing recreational marijuana at the state level and, although he is generally supportive of attracting new businesses to Town, he agrees that for East Haddam the sale of recreational cannabis should be kept at arm's length.

- Christopher Kurtin – stated he lives 1 mile away from the site of the proposed dispensary. He stated that marijuana use impedes an individual's ability to focus and he feels there isn't enough information about its use to allow a dispensary in Town at this time. He also feels that there isn't enough control over underage use of the substance and the reason he moved to East Haddam from New Haven was to avoid such problems.

- Kim Dodge – stated that every substance a person takes into their body has an impact on them and noted that cannabis is technically not a drug, it is an herb. She pointed out that when alcohol was prohibited, it led to more crime. She stated that people, adolescents included, will find a way to get any substance they want and it is not realistic to try to protect them from themselves. She stated it is possible to abuse any legal substance but she supports individual choice and she feels the majority of people will make good decisions. She stated that she does not think it is feasible to regulate a perfectly safe life because life just doesn't work that way and bad things sometimes happen. She noted several powerful illegal drugs that are easily obtained which are killing people. Ms. Dodge stated that cannabis is a natural substance that has been around forever and was legal for centuries before it was made illegal 100 years ago. She stated she supports a safe way to dispense cannabis similar to the way alcohol is managed. She also stated that she feels there is a lot of support in Town for a legal cannabis dispensary.

- Mike Anselmo – stated that his home is in close proximity to the proposed cannabis dispensary and expressed concern about traffic and a loss of value to his property.

Ms. Haines noted that several emails had been submitted related to the topic being discussed at the Public Hearing. She read the following into the record:

- Peter Klick - To whom it may concern,
  I'm not against Marijuana itself but as a resident of East Haddam I am not in favor of a marijuana store in town.
  This wouldn't be like every town that has their own package store that has their own residents visiting it. We're talking a radius of people from Old Saybrook to Middletown or larger pouring into this town all the time. Think about what we could be inviting into our town with it, and look at it hard from all angles.
  This is a quiet town and is the reason I moved here 16 years ago. There's a lot more a stake here that we could be setting ourselves up for,. and quite possibly not worth the little extra revenue..

- Janet Whitty - Good morning,
  I would like my opinion on this ordinance entered into the record for tonight's meeting.

  I am against this proposed ordinance to ban all aspects of cannabis business in our town. While I don't feel every town needs a retail establishment, that is only one aspect of the growing cannabis business. There is a lot of small business growth around cannabis that our town would be shutting the door to. The town seems to always be looking for ways to bring new businesses to town to help expand the tax base but yet we want to totally exclude this particular legal and legitimate business. I think that is a very short sighted and discriminatory proposal.

- Matt Rockwell - Hi
  I just wanted to voice my opinion that I do not support the proposed ordinance banning cannabis related business in town. Cannabis science keeps evolving as they discover new uses and properties of cannabinoids other than THC (the psychoactive one). Some of these other cannabinoids such as CBD, CBG, and CBN have been found to have a wide range of uses for inflammation and pain relief (CBD), and sleep (CBG). I'm sure most people have seen CBD products just about everywhere over the last several years. My main point is: as cannabis research continues, who knows what uses we will have for individual cannabinoids. To shut the door on say health supplements or drinks, or really any new product that we do not yet have in the market would be short sighted. This plant is much more important and useful beyond its simple/common use of relaxing and getting "high". Let's not back East Haddam into a corner and shut them out of a burgeoning industry for years to come. Regardless of peoples reasoning for using cannabis in their lives, the state has approved it and we should allow people to purchase cannabis products in a safe and regulated market. Banning these businesses from town would only force town residents to travel further to an adjacent town to purchase the same types of products. The only difference would be that residents would not be contributing to the towns tax base, and they would be inconvenienced by having to travel more. Take a look at any of the dispensaries in Massachusetts, or any of the current medical dispensaries here in CT. They are not attracting a rowdy clientele, but actually a fairly accurate cross section of socioeconomic status and various walks of life. These are normal people conducting normal and safe business transactions. We should not let our past fear and misconceptions govern our decisions.

- J. Klebeck - To the Board,

  I sincerely hope this issue will be put to a referendum. The Town should not be rejecting a perfectly legal revenue source when, inevitably, you will be coming back to the taxpayers this year or next looking for more revenue. Especially when the reasoning is based on 1950's Reefer Madness propaganda campaigns.

  Dispensaries in MA carry a 20% tax, including a 3% tax for the town they are located in. According to Industry Organizations the average dispensary can generate almost $1,000 in revenue per square foot. Thus a modestly sized 2,000sf facility (1/2 the size of the Moodus Pkg Store) would generate $2,000,000 in revenue per year and $60,000 in tax revenue – more than twice what the Town gets from the Goodspeed Foundation for tying up the entire Town Center.

  Studies in WA and CO conducted after legalization found no increase in crime, or a slight increase entirely attributable to increased enforcement, which then stabilized to pre-legalization levels.

  Dispensaries are coming. That is a fact of life. We can benefit from that, or we can allow other towns around us to claim the revenue.

  Again – I hope the Board does the right thing and takes this issue to the voters to decide.

- Jennifer Rieber - Thank you!
  I am wondering if I could propose putting together a field trip to a retail dispensary. I suspect that nobody here speaking against them has ever actually been to one. I would love to organize a trip.
  I live at 71 Ballahack Road East Haddam. :). Thanks.
  May I have the below entered into the record, as I may not be able to come in person this evening? Thank you.
  I would like to make public record that I am in favour of allowing retail cannabis operations, small scale farming, and other cannabis enterprises in town. I have been working annually in Colorado since recreational cannabis first became available, have been to various dispensaries across several states. I can attest to the highly regulated nature of these businesses. They are well funded, clean, organized and efficient retail shops, where a variety of products from infused bath soaks, to mints to cannabis flower can all be purchased in a highly controlled environment where the TCH levels are clearly marked and the sales team are well trained and educated in the product.
  Surrounding towns and cities will welcome these profitable tax paying retail shops. East Haddam will not be entertaining clients and traffic from all over the state, but will be serving the local community and vacationing visitors, providing a highly taxed and impeccably produced natural product that is currently traded without the benefit of quality control, or community revenue in the form of taxes.
  The debate about legal cannabis in this country is largely over. The choice to use cannabis is as personal as the choice to drink alcohol, or use tobacco. While the detractions of each of these products (to a lesser degree the cannabis) are well documented and fairly obvious, we as a society agree generally that we do not, as adults, ban the use of these products by other adults. Further, this is a profitable business model that is proven across many towns, cities and states. It would be incredibly reactionary to bar this type of business from town without a robust review of the financials, and a larger conversation about the development vision for this town.

- Marilyn Gleeson

  The only way to get a fair assessment of what the citizens feel is to have a referendum. Not everyone who might be in favor of a retail establishment might be willing to say so in public. A referendum should have two questions: 1) Do we want to allow a retail cannabis establishment; and 2) Do we want to allow the cultivation of cannabis in East Haddam. These should be separate questions as they are really separate issues.

Ms. Haines thanked the public for their input and reviewed the next steps in the process. There being no additional comments from the public, Ms. Haines adjourned the meeting 9:09 p.m.

Recorded