

The town of Leicester, MA held an emergency meeting last night to listen to the concerns of residents whose lives have been turned upside down since the opening of a retail marijuana store in town six days ago. Road closures, blocked streets and driveways, loud music, and public urination are the experiences of many of those in the neighborhood.

I drove more than 2 hours last night to attend the Leicester meeting. But before I get into my experience at the Leicester emergency Select Board Meeting, I want to tell you about the false narrative that is being repeated about the Leicester's disaster. A narrative that I hope the Brookline Select Board will not fall prey to.

That narrative is:

“IT WILL GET BETTER WHEN MORE STORES OPEN”

This is a talking point, but ***all*** of the evidence says the opposite. This is the false narrative that the Leicester Select Board repeated in their attempt to quiet the uproar over the situation that they created. It is the false narrative being pushed by the Cannabis Control Board to placate a nervous public. And it is the false narrative being told by the Cannabis Industry because they do not think that we are smart enough to know better.

But we do know better. These are the facts:

- In the first 12 months of retail marijuana in Washington State, sales per store doubled even as the number of stores grew 8-fold (Source: Washington Dept. of Revenue MJ Tax Obligation Monthly Reports. See Chart Below) . The volume and traffic at these new stores doesn't slow down or flatten. It grows a lot: that's the evidence-based fact, not the hope based assertion.
- In our 100+ hours of research, we could not find any pot shop in Washington of any size that did NOT grow a lot in its first year, and then more in its second.
- The odds of things being better here in Brookline are much lower than Washington State, because so many towns here have opted out of retail cannabis altogether. Where Washington State has hundreds of retailers, Massachusetts is on track to have far fewer. If more retailers doesn't work in Washington State, it's much less likely to work here.

So, in summary, It is just not true that more stores make it better. It is just not true that more stores mean less business for all marijuana stores. The data proves this. If it were true the stores in Washington would show flat and declining revenue over time. That is just not what we have seen in our research.

Now about my trip to Leicester.

I made the 2 hour drive to attend the emergency public meeting and to hear first hand what is taking place. Here is what I learned through talking to town officials, residents and listening to public testimony

- First ***Cultivate Is Next Door To Walmart:*** According to residents that I spoke with, Walmart generated minimal disruption when it came to town. So the marijuana store has had a bigger impact on the residents that the new Walmart.
- Second, the ***Industry Provided Information is Flawed:*** The information provided to town officials by the retailer, Cultivate, grossly underestimated the actual demand for the product and the impact of traffic and parking. **The predictions all underestimated the negative impacts; they systematically minimized the truth.**
- Third, the ***Quality of Life Has Declined:*** Resident after resident got up and gave testimony concerning the impact that the opening has had on the quality of life in their neighborhood. Testimony included reports of public urination in yards, closed streets, blocked driveways, loud music, traffic jams from 8am to 8pm, 7 days a week, open marijuana use, increase in litter and roadside trash, and an inability to get to neighboring businesses, to doctors appointments, or home after work.
- The traffic study predicted no impact at all on one of the roads that they have had turned into a queue essentially shutting it down. You can't get more wrong. The shop has had 1,000 visitors each day, and has stopped taking customers in mid-afternoon on some days even though the store stays open until 8 pm to serve those in line.
- Fourth ***Town Officials Are Struggling To Cope:*** I spoke with Police Chief Jim Hurley after the meeting. Chief Hurley is doing his best in a very bad situation. The overwhelming and unexpected demand has created serious problems for law enforcement and first responders. Through a combination of paid details, coordination with first responders in other towns and local policing, public safety is trying to keep roads open, traffic flowing and people safe. The Lieutenant Governor even called to offer assistance.

Here is what people were saying at the meeting:

- “[Cultivate] was way off on their estimates. We are getting 200% or more than they told us to expect. We totally underestimated the traffic and parking situation. The traffic survey was not useful” This from a Select Board Member.
- “This has been terrible,” Dawn Gauthier, a Leicester resident testified. “We have cars outside of our house seven days a week, 12 hours a day. We have no life there anymore. It’s like living in a fishbowl. . . . It’s not fair.”
- “The road was totally snarled,” Kim Miczek said, explaining that her business had only sold two trees the day Cultivate opened. “You couldn’t move. We just sat in here grinding our teeth.”
- “Neighbors are complaining that fire, police and rescue are blocked in their neighborhoods”
- “We can’t get to the store for groceries or to buy gas. It is a disaster”

My overall takeaway was that this industry is too new and it is too unpredictable to know what is going to happen. Town leaders cannot control an unpredictable situation.

So, we have a disaster in Leicester and some neighbors are asking to shut the store down. In Saint Mary's we have over 1,100 letters that recognize that the 1032 Beacon Street Site is a terrible location for a marijuana store. They are demanding that it not be opened.

What Can you do?

There are three immediate actions that you can take to help.

- Send an email to the members of the Select Board and tell them what is happening in Leicester can't happen here. Send it today, and tell them to stop calling concerned citizens alarmist when Leicester has had it even worse than we predicted. Select Board Email Addresses are listed at the bottom of this email.
- Send an email to the Select Board members and ask them why are they still considering Ascend's invalid application? Ascend's application does not meet the 500' buffer regulation nor the 5,000 gross square foot zoning law. It is Invalid. Ask the Select Board why they are working to solve Ascend's problems instead of the community's problems, and why are they engaging with Ascend after Ascend misled the town and the community.
- Make a financial donation to Save St. Mary's Neighborhood so that we can continue to fight for what is right for our Neighborhood and to help us prepare for legal action should the Select Board choose to unlawfully proceed with Ascend's application. You can donate [here](#)

As always, your support is greatly appreciated.

Paul

Below are links to media coverage of the Leicester Select Board Meeting.

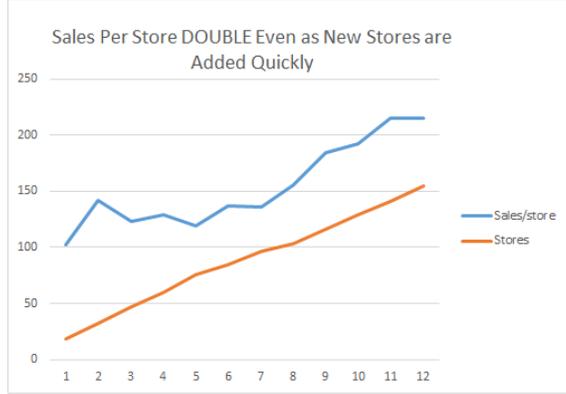
[The Boston Globe](#)

[WHDH](#)

[Boston 25](#)

Select Board Email Addresses

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Source: Washington Dept. of Revenue MJ Tax Obligation Monthly Reports
