

# Recreational Marijuana Facility Opens in Leicester, Massachusetts

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At 8:00 a.m., on November 20, 2018, the first licensed recreational marijuana dispensary in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts opened its doors for business in Leicester, Massachusetts. The opening of the business brought more than 1,100 customers to the facility on its first day of operation, and this trend would continue in the days that followed the initial opening. The Leicester Police Department worked with Cultivate to prepare for the opening, and the Leicester Police Department had a special operations plan in place several weeks prior to the opening. Unfortunately, the Leicester Police Department did not know what exactly to expect, as this dispensary was the first licensed recreational marijuana dispensary to open in Massachusetts.

## **Leicester Police Department's Special Operations Plan**

The Leicester Police Department's Special Operations Plan was straightforward. It addressed the following:

1. Traffic control
2. Crowd control
3. Parking violations
4. Pedestrian safety
5. School bus accessibility to bus stops
6. Event deconfliction (entered daily through RISSsafe)

along with an extensive list of other items that are part of any special operations planning for larger gatherings.

## **The Cultivate Plan**

For the opening of its recreational marijuana shop, Cultivate secured a 140-vehicle satellite parking lot. Customers, who parked in the lot, waited in a heated tent and then boarded shuttle vans that brought them to the Cultivate facility, which is about three minutes away from the parking lot. When customers boarded the shuttle, they were given a ticket (used to track the volume of customers) to get into the recreational dispensary at Cultivate. Upon arrival at Cultivate, there was a heated tent for them to wait in outside the facility (store capacity was 40 persons), porta potties, and a food truck. There were also porta-potties in the satellite parking lot and the dispensary parking lot.

## **The Challenges**

The opening on November 20th was a challenge for the Leicester Police Department, based on the following:

1. The opening occurred at the start of the busiest travel week of the year (i.e. Thanksgiving). In addition to controlling dispensary traffic, the LPD had to contend with holiday and "Black Friday" traffic volume.
2. There was a larger than anticipated volume of vehicles coming to the dispensary looking for parking. The LPD projected approximately a 1,000 vehicle increase for the opening. The volume of vehicles greatly exceeded our estimate.
3. Snow accumulation several days prior to the opening made non-paved parking areas muddy and unusable. The snow also constricted roadways around the facility.
4. The extremely low temperatures had LPD officers checking the waiting line periodically to determine if anyone was suffering from exposure.
5. The extensive media coverage of the dispensary opening far exceeded what was expected to the point that the media staging area needed to be expanded. The media coverage, while not as extensive as the first day, has continued into the second week.
6. While approximately 1,100 customers made it into Cultivate to make their purchase a large number of customers had to be turned away from the dispensary as Cultivate was unable to serve them by the time it was scheduled to close.

The Leicester Police Department's Special Operations Plan worked well the first two days. Day three was "Black Friday," and the increased traffic for the holiday weekend and the loss of parking areas caused significant problems and delays in and around the facility. Cultivate brought in message boards and restricted access to the facility to only customers using their parking lot (i.e. no walk-ups or drop offs permitted). This significantly reduced the volume of people waiting outside the facility in the cold. On Sunday (day five), another heavy holiday traffic day, the traffic at the facility declined slightly. It is unknown how long the trend of long lines will continue at the facility, but it will likely continue until more recreational marijuana shops open several weeks down the road.

#### **Additional Issues that Arose**

1. The LPD received reports at a community meeting that individuals who were in the queue/waiting line for parking were urinating in people's yards because of the long wait.
2. Neighbors also complained of trash being discarded along the roadway between the parking lot and dispensary by individuals waiting in the parking line and customers walking to the dispensary.
3. Vehicles for hire such as Uber, Lyft, taxi cabs and public transportation (buses) did not have a designated drop off location. These vehicles began stopping on Rt. 9 to drop off fares/passengers which increased congestion.
4. Other area businesses began charging for parking, but did not have entrance tickets to Cultivate. This resulted in those using their parking lot walking along Rt. 9 to the Cultivate lot to get entrance tickets.
5. Traffic congestion and the queue/waiting line to get into the parking lot caused problems for mail service in the area.

All of the aforementioned issues have been addressed, as the operations plan was updated after a critique at the end of each day.

## **Summary**

1. During the initial opening, more than 1,100 customers per day came through the facility.
2. Thousands of vehicles came into the area, slowing traffic on Route 9 in Leicester. Many of the vehicles were part of what I refer to as, "Cannabis Tourism"; meaning, they were not interested in making a purchase, but simply drove into the area to see what was happening at the facility. This only increased congestion.
3. There were long lines outside the facility in the cold temperatures. Waiting lines had to be closed at approximately 3:00 p.m., so everyone would get in by the 8:00 p.m. closing.
4. Officers monitored the waiting lines to ensure that individuals were not suffering from medical conditions, such as hypothermia.
5. The dispensary's parking lot filled to its 140-vehicle capacity quickly and there was an approximately ½ mile waiting line the first four days. The lot was expanded to hold approximately 200 vehicles by the second week, however the waiting line of parking continued well into the second week. By the third week the waiting line for parking had begun to diminish.

Any police department who has a recreational marijuana dispensary opening in its community can feel free to contact the Leicester Police Department for assistance. I have also attached to this a copy of the Leicester Police Department's Special Operations Plan and a timeline of events for the first day the facility was opened.

Cultivate Recreational Marijuana Facility  
Leicester, Massachusetts  
Day #1 Timeline

The following is a timeline of the first day's events for the opening of the Cultivate Recreational Marijuana Dispensary in Leicester:

- 5:30 a.m. Vehicles began lining up outside Cultivate's parking lot. Approximately 30 were waiting when I arrived at 5:30 AM. Detail officers were scheduled to arrive at 6 AM, which was two hours ahead of the scheduled opening.
- 6:30 a.m. Parking lot was open early and quickly filled to capacity, cars began backing up approximately one-half mile onto Route 9. The parking lot filled to its 140 vehicle capacity in approximately 15 minutes.
- 7:15 a.m. Waiting line for parking stretched one-half mile down the street from the lot. Many cars that arrived started to park elsewhere causing congestion on side streets and area business parking lots. Pedestrians began walking on, and crossing, Rt. 9 at multiple locations.
- 8:00 a.m. Cultivate's recreational marijuana dispensary opened for business. When the doors were opened for business, there were the 40 individuals allowed in the store (occupancy capacity) and there was a waiting line of several hundred people, which greatly exceeded the capacity for the heated tent that had been placed on the property.
- Noontime The waiting line at Cultivate extended a considerable distance, and officers walked the waiting line and checked on individuals, based upon extremely cold temperatures, and made sure there were no issues with hypothermia. Several individuals were brought inside to warm up based on officer concerns.
- 3:00 p.m. The waiting line was closed, and no additional customers were allowed to join the line, as it took until 8:00 p.m. to get the final customer in line into the store.
- 4:00 p.m. I completed my 16<sup>th</sup> (and final) media interview of the day.
- 8:00 p.m. The Cultivate recreational marijuana dispensary closed after 12 hours of operation, having served well in excess of 1,000 customers.
- 8:30 p.m. All three Leicester Police Department detail officers were released from their Cultivate assignments. Police coverage for the day extended from 6:00 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.



### **The Cultivate Dispensary**

Both of these photos show the dispensary. The top photo shows the heated tent outside the main entrance. Porta potties are located behind the tents. The line extends out of the heated tent and the photo below shows the line extending down along the side of the dispensary building. Wait time for this line is approximately 1.5 hours. Shuttle pick up and drop off takes place behind the Cultivate sign.





### **Dispensary's Satellite Parking Lot**

**Above** - The set up at the Cultivate satellite parking lot just prior to its opening for business. Porta-potties are located next to the heated tent with a shuttle van ready to transport the first customers to the dispensary.

**Below** - Rows of vehicles parked in the dispensary's satellite parking lot. Initially the lot held 140 cars but was expanded to hold approximately 200 vehicles.





### **Waiting Line (a.k.a “Queue”) for Dispensary Satellite Parking Lot**

**Above** - Vehicles wait in the queue (waiting) line for spots to open up in the dispensary’s satellite parking lot. At this point the queue (waiting) line is approximately 1/4-mile-long, as it stretches out of the picture frame. The traffic cones seen in the photo have “Do Not Block Driveway” signs attached to them.