



**Ridgefield  
Economic &  
Community  
Development  
Commission**

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**Geoffrey Morris**, Chair  
**Glori Norwitt**, Secretary  
**Christa Carone**  
**Sean Dowd**  
**Susan Gessner**  
**Bob Knight**  
**Steve Spivak**

**Rudy Marconi**, First Selectman  
[ridgefieldct.com](http://ridgefieldct.com)

**Economic & Community Development Commission  
Special Meeting  
Approved Minutes  
August 30, 2021, 6:30 pm via Zoom Video Conference**

**In Attendance:** Chairman Geoffrey Morris; Secretary Glori Norwitt; Commissioners Sean Dowd, Bob Knight, Steve Spivak, and Susan Gessner

**Also in attendance as Panelists:** State Senator Will Haskell; First Selectman Rudy Marconi; BOS members Robert Hebert, Maureen Kozlark and Sean Connelly; P&Z members Ben Njeji and Susan Consentino; Sarah Dukett and Arthur Wylene of Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC); Meg Sanders and Dan McCarthy of Canna Provisions in Massachusetts

Geoffrey Morris called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m., and noted that this is a Special Meeting with the sole focus of discussing possible retail cannabis sales in the Town.

**State Senator Will Haskell**

Senator Haskell noted that he is agnostic about a possible Ridgefield retail cannabis facility, but supported the State cannabis legalization bill. The CT Legislature created some of the safest state framework in the country, reviewing other states that had already legalized cannabis. Now it is the hands of local officials.

Senator Haskell discussed some of the restrictions of the new legalization bill, including the number of plants allowed, looking to ensure that people do not drive under the influence, restrictions on advertising, fines for first and later offenses, and noted that the intent to sell to someone under 21 is a crime. He noted this will be a highly regulated industry. He discussed social equity applicants for licenses. Local benefits which go directly to the Town are 3% sales tax based on gross receipt. He noted that use of marijuana laced with fentanyl has been a problem and resulted in deaths in our state.

### Meg Sanders

Meg is the Cofounder and CEO of Cannabis Provisions, a cannabis retailer based in Lee, Massachusetts. Sanders is a cannabis industry pioneer. In 2010, she opened Mindful, one of Colorado's first medical cannabis dispensaries. She was later appointed by Colorado's governor to assist officials in developing retail cannabis regulations.

She noted that this product is for adults. There are safe and responsible ways to consume this product. This is a business with lots of investment. A great deal is required to open doors including a security system, entering and exiting procedures, safes, more employees re checking identities. Heavy taxation burden on employers because it is not regulated federally. Cannabis retail businesses cannot take normal business deductions like payroll, rent and insurance.

She believes that towns must be thoughtful as to locations of this retail; the town should not set up a business to fail. Make sure it's a fit for the community, and has an opportunity to succeed. Parking and traffic issues are common. Average transaction time is 4-7 minutes. For her Massachusetts town of Lee, the client demographic is over age 50, average annual income is over \$75,000. There was a recent local newspaper article that stated the economic benefit to her town resulted in the town not having to raise taxes. Consumers want to go to a safe licensed facility to buy cannabis, instead of buying it on the street.

Lee MA has 2,500 people in town. For her business there, the town received almost \$1million in one year from her business alone. As a result, the town did not raise property taxes. However, revenue is not a reason to do this; do it for the economic benefit of jobs (1,200 employees in her retail industry) and bringing people to town to also go to other businesses. Get retail business that will be seriously engaged with the community.

### Rural County Representatives of California

Sarah Dukett and Arthur Wylene of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), a 37-member service organization that champions policies on behalf of California's rural counties.

Sarah is a legislative advocate for RCRC. She advocates on legislative proposals on behalf of RCRC members to enhance and protect the quality of life for rural California counties. Issue areas include cannabis, hemp, public safety, health and human services, elections, transportation, labor and economic development.

Arthur is General Counsel for RCRC, responsible for providing counsel to RCRC and its affiliate entities on a variety of internal matters as well as continuing to provide legal analysis on proposed legislation and regulations.

The 37 rural counties that RCRC represents are disproportionately the areas where cannabis is grown. RCRC's advocacy point has been local control – every community should make their own decisions. And with great control comes great responsibility. Local decisions can have effect in other parts of the state. Towns have impacts outside of its borders. California doesn't have state-wide limitations re taxes on cannabis. Local towns have a vibrant history of cannabis -- legal or otherwise.

They noted that the lesson learned by RCRC is to treat the retail cannabis decision as a "land use" issue. What are the traffic and public safety impacts? Security impacts? Parking impacts? When considering economic impact, think beyond retail. Stay abreast of regulations.

Sarah noted several issues. Local regulation will not be perfect on the first attempt; look at other communities to consider their regulations. Other items may arise that do not specifically relate to retail. The licensing process may need to be modified from time to time; this is an emerging industry and legislators should be ready to modify. Think through the fee structure for cost recovery.

Cannabis is not a cash cow; this is a small business that needs to establish its customer base; have modest expectations. Vet your cannabis permittees – who may be ready and willing to be in your community.

For some California communities that did not allow retail cannabis, some of their reasons were: resource vs. benefit; lack of community support; revenue not great enough; saturation with retail sales in nearby towns.

State Senator Haskell noted that on September 14, State Representative Aimee Berger-Girvalo will hold a follow-up conversation re possible cannabis retail sales in Ridgefield.

#### Questions and Comments provided to ECDC

From Max Porter of Hamlet Hub:

1. What steps are going to be taken to prevent people from unlawfully buying retail cannabis?
2. What specific difference between states like California or Massachusetts and Connecticut will have to be assessed and taken into account to effectively integrate cannabis into Connecticut communities?
3. What concerns were voiced by the opposers of the bill to introduce recreational cannabis use in Connecticut? How are these worries being addressed?
4. Did the perceived economic or health benefits of recreational cannabis have a more significant role in the passing of Connecticut's recent legalization?
5. Are there any plans to introduce and pass legislation in Connecticut similar to Oregon's recent decision to decriminalize small amounts of all drugs?

From Bill Bruno of Nod Road:

1. Has the human/social cost (injury and death) of increased impaired driving accidents been included in the economic analysis of the ECDC in making their recommendations?
2. What is the cost of training and increased staffing for the Ridgefield Police and Fire departments in order to detect and control cannabis-impaired driving in the area? What is the cost of the Police, Fire, and EMT resources that would be required to service increased accidents? Is new equipment to detect cannabis-impaired

drivers available for Police and Fire professionals to use, and what is the cost? Has this been included in the ECDC analysis?

3. Has the human/social and direct medical costs of these health impacts been included in the economic analysis of the ECDC in making their recommendations?

4. Has the increased costs of training and staffing for area hospitals as well as for mental health and other health professionals been assessed? Has any of these costs been included in the ECDC analysis?

Mitch Ancona asked:

Is there a way to preserve the Town's ability to have a retail marijuana license until it can be voted on by the Town constituency?

Suzanna Brennan, Executive Director of Lounsbury House, asked:

What can be done to restrict:

1. Dispensaries in busy shopping districts and other kid-friendly locations (near schools, church, healthcare facilities)
2. Weed SUV and mobile party buses
3. Pot lounges
4. Cannabis bars
5. Weed delivery businesses
6. Recreational offering as part of theater/art classes, etc.
7. Locations where public can smell / see pot smoking
8. Controlling potency of addicting weed products

Tina Malhotra of the BOE asked:

Does the State plan to fund and increase the number of addiction/substance abuse treatment facilities? And public awareness education?

Michael Gonley commented:

Just a note to share my lack of support for the sale and use of cannabis in Ridgefield. If approved it will be like other cities where everywhere you go you will be greeted with the stench of pot. It is enough that it is readily available at Ridgefield High School and elsewhere. Why open a store to sell it? It will put a stain on this unique town.

### Discussion

ECDC Chair Geoffrey invited any and all present members of the BOS and P&Z to speak. None of the elected officials accepted the invitation to speak.

Arthur discussed a question from the Ridgefield Prevention Council, about what precautions can be taken to prevent access to cannabis by those under 21 years of age. Arthur noted that issues of noncompliance typically revolve around non-licensed retails, as opposed to under-age use. Meg noted that in Massachusetts, selling cannabis to someone under 21 years old results in the retail sales license from being revoked. Her business checks IDs three times during a sale. The price of the product does not support resale to under 21s; there is no market for it. He noted that cultivation and manufacturing are separate licenses.

The CT bill provides funding and has various departments like Health & Family and Addiction agencies to assist in treatment with addiction, and report data on epidemiology. The Bill includes provisions for prosecuting sales by individuals who are 2+ years older than buyer.

State Senator Haskell noted that cannabis has been added to the list of where smoking is not allowed: inside certain buildings including restaurants, within 25 feet of certain buildings, not near dorms or schools. Also advertising for cannabis is restricted in certain ways.

Commissioner Spivak noted that alcohol sales are restricted in certain ways, and cannabis sales have been considered much more in depth. He noted that cannabis retail sales could fill empty business space in town.

In response to a question about the homelessness problem in question and whether that population started with marijuana, the RCRC noted that drug abuse is heavily considered in CA as arising from inadequacies in the mental health system, problems in the criminal justice system, the high cost of housing and other problems, but is not considered to arise from marijuana use.

In response to a question about whether cannabis use leads to stronger illegal drug use, Meg noted that heroin addictions generally start with prescription drug use.

### Conclusion

ECDC Chair Geoffrey noted that this special meeting is only the beginning of a dialogue on the possibility of cannabis retail sales in Ridgefield. Commissioner Norwitt noted that the only question now is whether the Town and its constituents want cannabis retail sales in Town; the question of whether to legalize cannabis use has already been decided by State legislators.

Dan McCarthy noted that he can provide statistical information from states that have already legalized cannabis use.

Meg offered personal tours of her facilities in Holyoke or Lee, Massachusetts.

### Recording

The meeting has been recorded, and will be posted on the website [www.ridgefieldct.org](http://www.ridgefieldct.org) under "Meeting Videos." Questions may be submitted to the Ridgefield ECDC.

**Motion to adjourn by Glori; seconded by Steve. Motion carries 5-0. The meeting concluded at 7:55pm.**

Respectfully Submitted by:

Glori Norwitt, ECDC Secretary