

Council Address - April 13, 2021

Hello Mr. Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councilors, I want to thank you for having me here today. I am going to start by telling you a bit about myself and how it came to be that I am sitting in front of you. As you know my name is Melissa, I am a married mom of 2 boys ages 9 and 11, we currently live in Windsor, I was born in Windsor raised in Tecumseh and in my teen years moved to Lasalle. That being said I have a special connection to this town all of my childhood memories are here and I currently operate my business here.

My past employment includes various roles in finance, from administration to sales at prominent companies like Sterling Mutuals Inc., Great-West Life and London Life. I have owned a cleaning company that was built to offer flexibility while raising my children, after 5 years it had served its purpose and it was time to move on. I was working a sales position with London Life when legalization of cannabis happened in Canada, I was excited by all of the possibilities. As soon as the opportunity became available, I started working towards the industry. I had set myself up with a position in the LCBO distribution system when the announcement came from the provincial government, they were moving from the LCBO model to private cannabis retail. I didn't hesitate and left my position in sales and moved into the cannabis industry, something I have been navigating slowly while watching the enormous changes from LCBO model to private sales with lottery systems soon to be changed again and the list goes on and on in the evolution of this emerging industry. Not knowing where the changes were going to lead and not having access to large financial sums, I stepped back a bit. Like the Town, I took a wait and watch approach. After establishing a client base through word of mouth and attending local markets with handmade local products, I opened a hemp shop with my husband's cousin Tiffany in October 2019. This was to be a foot in the door and a spot to grow from for 2 moms just starting out in the cannabis industry. This is when the hurdles in the industry all became apparent, see hemp has been legal in Canada since 1998 and is used for many different things like textiles, plastics, food, building materials and medicine to name a few. Even though it is legal, banks, payment processors, insurance companies, landlords etc. still view it as cannabis and impose restrictions, but even cannabis is legal now. This is when the real challenges became quite clear to me as a cannabis related business owner and how the struggle was going to continue. It is only natural then that I move into the retail side of cannabis as it stands in Ontario today, as I face most of the same trials.

All of this being said, all of it together, nothing prepared me for 2020. As I mentioned I currently own a hemp store with my partner Tiffany. Gingers – House of Hemp Inc. in Tecumseh specifically, Oldcastle. We are located in the old Castle Beef building on Hwy 3 and Walker Road, funny enough, that is where I met my husband 22 years ago today. We have put a lot of personal investment and sweat equity into that space and our business, there is a sense of attachment that comes along with that. We are cannabis enthusiasts; we provide hemp alternatives and an educational environment around hemp and cannabis as a whole. We promote a love of the plant and work to reduce the stigma around it. We always planned to add cannabis retail to what we offer, after all when we promote our love for the plant, we should be encompassing it in its entirety. We were not in a big hurry for this addition when we

started out, however, we like so many other small and even large business have faced some unimaginable trials due to Covid. We were only open 6 months when we had to close the doors. At present, we need to expand the business plan immediately to promote growth. Our situation has been exasperated by the fact that in April 2020 Tiffany was diagnosed with grade 4 glioblastoma - this is terminal brain cancer. So many times in the past year it would have been easy to walk away, but watching the fight Tiff has in her has inspired me drive forward and while we had minimal line of sight to the challenges 2020 and now 2021, I have remained committed to the restructuring of our business regardless of the hurdles. I am licensed and prepared to move forward. We are now entering the third year of legalization and I have come here today to tell my story and ask that you reconsider your position and opt-in to private cannabis retail. The goal for me personally is to see our business succeed and grow to become what we had always envisioned it to be and not have to leave the town where it all started not so long ago. Never the less, I do understand that by no means in this about me.

The arrangement for today's conversation is interesting because I am here to represent a true mom and pop style small business. We are planning growth as business allows. The additional delegates represent an established growing business in the cannabis industry, we are going to be able to gather an understanding for both sides.

I had mentioned in my original letter to Mayor McNamara and council that I appreciate there is a level of concern and uncertainty surrounding the emerging cannabis industry. However, I also believe having a healthy, sustainable and responsible system of distribution, regulation and enforcement that is effective and inclusive can provide a widespread benefit to the community. In the Dec 11, 2018 meeting 4 of the 5 "strategic priorities" for Tecumseh were met, let's try and check that final box tonight.

Tecumseh and Lakeshore were the first local municipalities to make a decision on private cannabis retail and they had chosen to opt-out. Both towns taking a responsible "wait and watch" approach, saying no for now, but not never. This position was taken for various different reasons, I did refer to the past council meeting, read the articles and listened to the interview with Mayor McNamara and Dan MacDonald for reference and perspective.

I have always been under the impression Tecumseh was progressive regarding Cannabis. In 2015 approval was provided for a medical cannabis facility on # 3 Hwy in Oldcastle. Even though this has faced push back from the residence it has still been able to move forward. The main concern from residence was smell and light pollution from the cannabis production. Neither of those concerns are presented by cannabis retail stores. One resident had said "We're not against cannabis facilities" the residents opposing this facility were hoping for a different location for that particular facility. Mayor McNamara had said back then "We've got to look at the business itself. We have to remember it's a legal product," And "It's always good to listen on both sides and break down a lot of the fears. This is something new." I respect that statement immensely; it is something new and with that there is a lot of stigma to reduce with regard to cannabis and education is the key here. Also, in 2020 Peek Processing a cannabis foods and drink manufacturer was granted licencing to start production also located in

Oldcastle. Opening up to retail sales adds the ability for not only my business but the other two existing cannabis related business I have mentioned here the opportunity for growth and incidentally allows for additional business open up shop within the Town.

On Tuesday Oct 22, 2019 Lakeshore had reversed its decision and opted into brick and mortar private cannabis retail. Even though opting in at a later date was not as lucrative as waiting, it gave them time to make considerations.

Those in favor talked about the benefits of cannabis use and the importance of personal liberty. Providing access shows that civil liberties are a priority for council to provide to members of the community. Sending a positive message that this is in fact a progressive community.

Lakeshore officials also surveyed 11 municipalities that already have retail stores, the report to council states "None of the municipalities could identify a single complaint directly related to the cannabis retail stores in their communities," a sentiment that was reiterated by Simon Reid owner of Boon Dom in Windsor stating that "neighbors have welcomed us with open arms" Lakeshore also hosted a community survey, "Residents have said with a majority to move forward," said Deputy Mayor Tracey Bailey. "Opting in is the right thing to do."

The town of Lasalle was presented with a staff report to council prior to its council meeting Tues March 23, 2021 listing 19 community benefits of cannabis retail, but lists no detriments. As you may know just a few weeks ago on March 23, 2021 the Town of Lasalle opted-in to private cannabis sales. Town council passed the motion unanimously.

As you can see by comparison the fears have been reduced and there was no direct increase to use of municipal service and virtually no disruption to residents in municipalities who opted-in and no reason to think it would in the future.

Retail locations follow a lengthy list of regulations regarding store premises, surveillance, security, training of employees, advertising and promotion, and prevention of unlawful activities. All stores are required to provide educational information in store for shoppers on harm reduction. Being that these stores are so highly regulated they by nature provide a mechanism to keep product out of the hands of minors, retail locations are required to maintain a high level of social responsibility and make sure every sale is a responsible one. Another apprehension that has been brought up on different occasions is stores proximity to schools. Retail outlets cannot be located near a school or private school, as defined in the Education Act, a cannabis retail store must be 150 meters away from the property line of the school. Also, ingestion by smoking or vaping is not permitted at schools, on school property and at school-related activities. In addition, smoking or vaping cannabis is prohibited all public areas within 20m of these grounds. Keeping this in mind along with any other bylaws the town as enacted with regards to the smoke free Ontario act.

By integrating cannabis retail into a community, it does provide financial benefits. I know Mayor McNamara had stated on a.m. 800 March 24 that the majority of the financial benefits are

realized by provincial and federal governments. If we take a second to look a little deeper you can see the financial benefits to the community also come from spin off support. We would be using local contractors to build out our spaces, local security, local telecommunication, financial institutions, accountants to name a few. Again, Simon Reid owner of Boon Dom had stated in 18 months they have been able to give back approx. \$100,000. to local business. This is a small business currently with just one store. Also, where cannabis retail outlets are located there is naturally an increase in traffic to surrounding business helping them thrive. Putting money in to the hands of the people who then spend in the community brings a benefit to those who own small business in the community. It creates a very positive domino effect. This is of course on top of the financial benefit the Town could see from the provincial government.

All cannabis sold in retail locations must come from the OCS (Ontario Cannabis Store). The OCS is focused on serving the needs of cannabis consumers through growing access to tested, regulated, Health Canada approved products that are traceable, fairly priced and provide legal jobs in communities across Canada. In the OCS Q3 report they stated Between Oct 1, 2020 and Dec 31, 2020 - 30,000,000. grams of legal cannabis was sold in Ontario. Even with the in-person shopping restriction brought on by Covid of those legal sales, 88%, yes 88% happened in legal brick and mortar shops. Therefore, expanding physical access in unserved or underserved communities is the key to continued growth. With private retail stores available the majority of customers that prefer to access legal cannabis are coming to expect a true retail experience. It is clear to see this is great news for small business. Cannabis stores are a legitimate business that have the potential to employ large numbers of people with a healthy mix of full time and part-time well-paying positions.

To reiterate, I am asking council to re-consider its position and opt-in to private cannabis sales. Thank you for your time and consideration.