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To pot or not? - by Carol Todreas

July 12, 2019 - Front Section



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People want small stores for convenience without having to go through aisles of “stuff” they do not want nor need. The opportunity for local neighborhood stores is better than in many decades. While brick and mortar retail continues to weed out older stores, it is the “weed” that is a powerful attraction for today's consumer. But, is it right for the neighborhood?

Adult use cannabis (recreational cannabis) stores are legal in Massachusetts, but not in the nation. As of this writing there are 100 licenses with more in the pipeline; yet ,even though demand is high, supply remains low. Opening a retail store is not for the faint hearted. There are enormous hurdles preventing openings, most of which have to do with host communities blocking the approval. This coupled with the fact that it is still not legal in the nation means that banks cannot be involved and financing must come from friends and family.

Recreational cannabis retail is still in its infancy in Massachusetts, and so far these stores do not fit well in local communities. They are still viewed as retail for desperados with few to support their presence. Visually most of the existing shops in Massachusetts have a medicinal-care appearance from the street, and once inside the appearance can be equally dull. From a business perspective, though, this does not seem to matter. Consumers flock to the few stores that are open and sales have been in the millions.

A proposed retail cannabis store for Newton, Mass., has projected revenue of \$11 million in a neighborhood location formerly tenanted by a dry cleaner whose sales averaged around \$400,000. If the proposed store is approved and operating, the increased congestion and parking will be a nightmare until other stores open to increase supply.

Although taxes and good neighbor cooperation can help diffuse the negativism, this retail category is forced by state regulation to be secure and these measures make it almost impossible to have a user-friendly look. While the store succeeds regardless, the use does not add to the neighborhood shopping experience.

But, things are changing. At Barney's, Beverly Hills, CA, on the 6th floor there is a cannabis emporium, with bejeweled bongos, weed-holding necklaces and other accessories for sale to complement the weed. This fashion will eventually trickle down to the rest of us, change the image, and we will have cafes, restaurants, and local stores selling cannabis like a glass of wine or a pint of beer . Then will neighborhoods really prosper!

Thanks to Brian Anderson, Anderson Porter Design, expert on design for the cannabis industry, for his insights on the cannabis industry.

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