

Meet the new Boston Cannabis Board

Mayor Walsh appoints five officials to oversee marijuana licensing

By [Dan Adams](#) Globe Staff, Updated March 4, 2020, 1:00 p.m.



Lisa Holmes, a retired Boston Police Department superintendent, was named to the city's new Cannabis Board by Mayor Martin J. Walsh. JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

Say hello to the city of Boston's newest government agency: the Cannabis Board.

Mayor Martin J. Walsh on Wednesday appointed five members to the board, which will issue recommendations on which marijuana companies should receive local licenses and advise Walsh's office on cannabis regulation and policy. Its creation follows [criticism](#)

that Boston's previous process for choosing pot operators has been slow and opaque, giving an advantage to better-connected and wealthier firms.

The Cannabis Board's members are Kathleen Joyce, the chair of Boston's Licensing Board and the former top lawyer at the Boston Planning and Development Agency; Monica Valdes Lupi, Boston's former health commissioner; Darlene Lombos, the executive secretary-treasurer of the Greater Boston Labor Council; former Boston Police Department superintendent Lisa Holmes; and John Smith, the director of programs at TSNE MissionWorks, a nonprofit that provides meeting space plus management, training, and consulting services to other nonprofits.

"The purpose of Boston's Cannabis Board is to make sure our actions continue to match our values: supporting equity, diversity, and local ownership in this new industry," Walsh said in a statement.

The five Cannabis Board members will serve two-year terms and be paid \$600 for each day they work on behalf of the board, according to [an executive order issued by Walsh](#). Members — like all city employees — are barred from participating in any cannabis companies in Boston.

Walsh officials said the Cannabis Board will hold its first meeting this month, and meet regularly about twice a month. That could speed up local approvals, which had largely been on hold for months while Walsh's administration negotiated with the City Council about the details of the new system.

The city so far has issued 14 host community agreements, deals that spell out operating conditions and call for each company to pay 3 percent of its revenue to the city as a fee — and which are required before companies can apply for licenses from the state Cannabis Control Commission. The city's first recreational marijuana store, Pure Oasis in Grove Hall, is expected to open within days or weeks.

The creation of the board stems from a [12-1 City Council vote in November](#) approving an overhaul of the city's process for selecting which marijuana operators win those coveted local permits. The ordinance, proposed by council president Kim Janey and [approved by Walsh](#), is intended to increase the transparency and predictability of the process by having the board vote in public on applications scored using clear, weighted criteria. A detailed process for scoring the applications and rendering a decision has yet to be worked out, officials said.

Previously, Walsh's Office of Emerging Industries decided behind closed doors which companies received host community agreements, prompting [complaints that the process was opaque and favored the politically-connected](#). (The mayor's administration has countered that the 14 applicants it has approved so far are diverse in size and ownership, and that the city tried to balance neighborhood concerns with pressure from advocates and applicants to quickly roll out pot shops and other marijuana facilities with diverse owners.

Under the new system, the mayor still retains legal power to issue or withhold host community agreements. But city officials said that, in practice, his administration will follow the Cannabis Board's recommendations in all but very unusual circumstances.

Among the board's most difficult tasks will be working with other departments to apply the city's marijuana buffer zone policy, which stipulates that each cannabis facility must be a half-mile from any other one. In several neighborhoods, multiple applicants are jostling to open pot stores in the same area.

The new ordinance also establishes an equity program offering technical assistance and training for entrepreneurs trying to open marijuana facilities in Boston who were arrested in the past for marijuana crimes, or who belong to groups or communities disproportionately targeted by police enforcing the prohibition of cannabis.

The new board is required under the ordinance to approve equal numbers of equity program participants and other applicants.

Some local entrepreneurs of color are skeptical of the new system, even though it's designed to benefit them.

“They look like a very talented, professional bunch of people,” Chauncy Spencer, who’s trying to open a marijuana store in Mattapan, said of the new board. “But I fear only the most corporate-like applicants will survive scrutiny.”

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