

# Boston prepares for its first marijuana store, and its future pot industry

City officials want to head off neighborhood complaints like those in Brookline

By [Naomi Martin](#) Globe Staff, Updated February 28, 2020, 6:18 p.m.



Pure Oasis, at 430 Blue Hill Ave., is expected to soon open as Boston's first marijuana store, and the state's first shop owned by an economic empowerment applicant. JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

With Boston's first marijuana store poised to open within weeks in Dorchester, officials are planning for massive crowds — and the city's future pot industry.

Officials want to keep long customer lines from blocking sidewalks near the store in the Grove Hall section and patrol the area for illegal parking and public marijuana smoking, Alexis Tkachuk, Boston's director of emerging industries, said during a panel discussion Thursday for cannabis lawyers and executives.

The goal, officials said, is to head off some of the [neighborhood complaints](#) after Greater Boston's first pot shop [opened](#) in Brookline a year ago.

The Dorchester store, Pure Oasis, on Blue Hill Avenue, is finishing staff training and state requirements before its last inspection. Its opening will mark an important milestone as the state's first store owned by people in the state's economic empowerment program, which is aimed at boosting communities hardest hit by the war on drugs.

"We are now very much focused on the opening of this shop," Tkachuk said. "It is very exciting for the city of Boston, for the state, for the Eastern Seaboard."

The city also expects three other marijuana stores to "not lag too far behind" Pure Oasis, Tkachuk said. She said the next shops to open will likely be Ascend by North Station, Berkshire Roots in East Boston, and Patriot Care, a medical marijuana dispensary already open near Downtown Crossing that wants to sell recreational pot.

Pure Oasis leaders say they will have 40 employees and expect up to 1,000 customers per day which will be a boon for the neighborhood, resulting in more customers for nearby shops. Their security staff will keep sidewalks clear, and the business rented space next door that can fit 100 people waiting in line indoors, said Kobie Evans, a co-owner of Pure Oasis.

"We want to be good community partners and make sure Grove Hall is as vibrant and enterprising as possible," Evans said.

Boston is learning from Brookline, whose cannabis store, New England Treatment Access, draws about 2,500 daily customers and has prompted neighbor complaints about parking, traffic, litter, and public pot smoking. Another town, Leicester, near Worcester,

also struggled with crowds in November 2018 when its pot shop, Cultivate, became one of the first two cannabis stores to open on the East Coast.

“Brookline is more urban than Leicester, but it still has a lot more open space” than Dorchester, Tkachuk said.

Many cannabis entrepreneurs in the audience said they were frustrated that Boston’s permitting process has appeared stalled for the past year, while they paid thousands of dollars in monthly rent not knowing if they would ever receive city approval.

With the Dorchester opening, Boston is entering a new, faster phase of its cannabis rollout. Mayor Martin J. Walsh’s administration is expected to soon appoint a five-member cannabis board that will approve businesses. One of the board’s first jobs will be to review 28 companies’ applications for host-community agreements, which are contracts required to apply for a state license.

So far, the city has signed 14 agreements. Three, including Pure Oasis, are economic empowerment applicants.

The city [passed an ordinance](#), proposed by Council President Kim Janey, aimed at boosting cannabis business ownership by “equity businesses” owned by local entrepreneurs from largely Black, Latino, and low-income areas that were disproportionately affected by drug policing.

Massachusetts was the first state to include that goal in its cannabis legalization law. The ordinance establishes an “equity fund” for disadvantaged applicants, using money from the city and pot businesses. The ordinance requires an equal ratio of equity businesses to non-equity businesses to move forward in Boston.

Asked whether the equal-ratio requirement could slow the industry if equity businesses struggle with capital, Tkachuk said no. Entrepreneurs can receive money from the equity fund and guidance from the city’s economic development staff, she said.

The city's and state's efforts are crucial, Janey said, but they won't be enough.

"We got here after 400 years of oppression," she said at Thursday's panel discussion.

"We're not going to solve it with one ordinance or one state law."

Janey said the city should also consider freeing equity businesses from restrictive zoning requirements and implementing an equal ratio requirement in shopping areas like the Back Bay, the Seaport, and Downtown Crossing.

"If you look at major cities that have come before us, they have not provided a successful blueprint," Tkachuk said. "Boston is going to lead the way on equity for major cities in the United States."

But Ed Gaskin, executive director of Greater Grove Hall Main Streets, said he felt the city should have required Pure Oasis to provide more benefits to the neighborhood in its agreement.

"We're giving up parking, there's more traffic, more congestion — what do we get in return?" Gaskin said.

The contract requires Pure Oasis to pay 3 percent of its sales revenue to the city, which is the maximum payment state law specifies.

Additional payments in city contracts [have emerged](#) as one of the major barriers to small businesses in the industry.

"The bigger players can afford to buy a firetruck," said Steven Hoffman, chairman of the Cannabis Control Commission. "The smaller players can't."

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