

BUSINESS, LIFESTYLE, NEWS

# LYNN PLANS TO LEARN FROM THE LESSONS OF THE STATE'S ROUGH LAUNCH OF RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA

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BY BELLA DIGRAZIA | December 4, 2018

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*A detail photo of a sample of the marijuana strain, Mimosa, at Apothica in Lynn. (Spenser R. Hasak)*

LYNN — Two weeks ago, New Englanders waited in hours-long lines for the opening of the state's first recreational pot shops. Lynn says it has learned from the mistakes of Leicester and Northampton.

While [Boston.com](#) reported the lines at New England Treatment Access (NETA) in Northampton reached almost three-hour wait times, the [Boston Globe](#) reported “absolute mayhem” throughout Leicester’s recreational pot launch with Cultivate. Lynn opened its medical marijuana shop at the beginning of the month on the Lynnway, with Newton-based company Apothca, Inc., and is expected to start selling recreationally by February, according to co-founder Joseph Lekach.

“I wasn’t surprised about the issues in Leicester, it was one of first recreational shops open in the entire state,” said Lekach. “It was going to be bananas. Everyone just wanted to go experience a recreational marijuana store in Massachusetts because they haven’t been able to do so, yet.”

The Globe reported Leicester residents had major complaints over long lines of traffic, closed streets and detours, pedestrians trekking along a highway with no sidewalk, litter, public urination and pot consumption, overly aggressive shuttle bus drivers ferrying customers to and from a nearby parking lot, and poor communication from Cultivate. Local business owners complained traffic was hurting their sales.

Lekach said his company is working with city officials to ensure they are well equipped for the beginning of recreational marijuana sales in Lynn. He said the Lynnway is a busy state highway that is already used to handling increase in traffic and one advantage Apothca has is it secured overflow parking from its neighbor, One Dollar Zone.

Once the recreational marijuana sales begin, Apothca employees will park off site and be shuttled in by buses, along with customers, if necessary, said Lekach. He said his company has been in constant contact with Lynn Police Chief Michael Mageary to keep each other up to date from an operational perspective and the company would be willing to hire off-duty officers for police details.

“Those two stores weren’t just the first two to open in Massachusetts, but (on) the entire East Coast,” said Lekach. “As more stores open, we expect a significant inflow of customers but it is not going to be a permanent craziness, just a temporary craziness of everyone wanting to see what it looks like and then we can start going into a normalized routine.”

Apothca also has a slew of electronic plans to prepare for their recreational debut, he said. Some of them will allow customers to order ahead as well as create a wait-time timer on their website so customers can get a heads-up before heading over.

“There is no question I think we would be prepared,” said Lou Markakis of Lynnway Associates. “There are a lot of surrounding businesses in support of each other here and we made sure we addressed the concerns for the community at large. The Lynnway needs something and I believe this is it.”

Sam Vitali, a Lynn lawyer who represents Apothca, said part of avoiding the issues that Leicester faced is choosing the site for the recreational pot shops. He said the best way to keep a positive flow is to select sites that are not near residential areas, schools, or places where young residents hang out.

“Right now, the Lynnway site (Apothca) is probably the first in Lynn to open, but there are others not too far behind it,” Vitali said.

While Apothca waits for the final step of its recreational sales process, receiving the certificate of sales from the Cannabis Control Commission (CBC), there are other sites being proposed throughout the city’s downtown. Vitali said the CBC has a formula where recreational licenses will be a minimum of 20 percent of what package store licenses are for the community.

With nearly 40 liquor package stores in Lynn, that presumably makes for a total of eight sites for the city, said Vitali. The first to open will most likely be Apothca on the Lynnway, with a standalone recreational shop on Oxford Street not far behind. Other site proposals include two on Western Avenue, one across from General Electric and the other where Tony the Florist was located, one on State Street and another on Mount Vernon Street, according to Vitali.

He said there are also talks of marijuana cultivation centers on Alley Street and Linden Street.

“Eventually these stores will be as prevalent as package stores and this is just the beginning of that industry,” said Jim Cowdell, executive director for Economic Development & Industrial Corporation.



Bella diGrazia

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