

## **Lake Como Discusses the Possibility of Amending its Marijuana Ordinances**

**Jack Slocum**

**March 13, 2023**

The Lake Como Mayor and Council recently held a workshop discussing the possibility of amending the borough's ordinances on recreational marijuana sales. While no action was taken, officials considered the idea of allowing one or more cannabis dispensaries in Lake Como.

Since 2021, marijuana sales have been banned in Lake Como in regard to the state's legalization of it. While it is legal state-wide, it is up to municipalities whether or not it is allowed within the borough.

According to Mayor Kevin Higgins, the mayor and council have been receiving inquiries from the public about legalizing marijuana sales in Lake Como, which led to this March 7 workshop.

Lake Como's Borough Attorney Marguerite Schaffer laid out the borough's possibilities if it decides to move forward with lifting the ban. It would be at the town's discretion what kind of dispensary it would be, how many there could be, and what kind of municipal licensing proceedings would need to be in place.

“(The town) can restrict the (operation) hours, the days, the number of parking spaces... You get to weigh in from the beginning, the middle, and the end,” Schaffer said. “There's a lot of discretion on the part of the municipality to decide what they want, who they want, why they want it, where they want it, etcetera.”

The borough would have nearly full control over the logistics of the “pot shop” including the space's zoning restrictions. For example, while there are no state laws restricting a cannabis facility to be a certain distance from a school, the municipality could put those restrictions in place if it wishes. Additionally, any entity that wants to open a dispensary in Lake Como would first need licensing from the borough, in which the borough can implement a “reasonable licensing fee” that can be renewed annually if the town decides.

Schaffer also described the “driving impact” marijuana sales would have on the borough’s economy. For example, the borough is able to charge up to two percent of gross sales from the dispensary.

“With some of the predictions that have been bandied around... (A dispensary) could bring in a couple hundred thousand dollars a year. To a town like Lake Como, that could be pretty significant,” Schaffer said. “That’s obviously something for the council to decide and something for the residents to weigh in on.”

Schaffer then cited studies regarding how property values have gone up in areas with dispensaries, though “not significantly.” She added that while the increase isn’t particularly significant, the values do not go down, likely due to the town’s increase in income stabilizing or decreasing residents’ taxes.

She also cited studies on youth usage of recreational marijuana, saying that there hasn’t been a “statistical impact” on children using marijuana in areas with dispensaries. In other words, “it doesn’t help, but it doesn’t hurt,” she said.

Councilman Nick DeMauro commented on the possibility of a cannabis establishment in the borough, saying that he’s read studies that counter the ones that Schaffer cited, specifically regarding youth marijuana usage. He added that he didn’t want to debate the idea at this point, but is prepared to “make it an issue if we move forward.”

To learn more about studies conducted on marijuana legalization, [click here](#) to view an analysis of several from the CATO Institute. The analysis focuses on studies of crime, health, road safety, economic outcomes, and more in relation to marijuana use and its legalization.

“As of right now we have an ordinance that prohibits (cannabis facilities,) and whether we change that ordinance at any time, now, ever, or never, I think it’s important that the council is up-to-date on where we’re going,” Mayor Higgins said. “And a lot of this might adjust or change over time... I think it’s important that we’re all knowledgeable in what we’re doing.”

After the workshop, two residents expressed concerns about allowing a cannabis establishment to be set up in Lake Como. It is unclear when or if the borough will return to the topic. The next council meeting will be on March 21 at 7:30 p.m.