

From: Aaron G [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 16, 2023 12:05 PM
To: Public Hearings
Subject: Dear Mayor and Council

Dear Mayor and Council,

My name is Pat Warren, and I am one of the owners of Pineapple Victoria cannabis outlet. In March of this year I addressed the Mayor and Council regarding the concerns that our team had with regards to Vic Canna Co opening a retail cannabis shop approximately 150 meters from our storefront retail space. I wish to reiterate a few of the key points that we believe are the most troublesome.

Pineapple Victoria has been a 3-family, locally owned business from day 1. Our average wage is \$24 an hour and we provide medical and dental benefits to our staff. We are only able to do this because the City of Victoria has allocated breathing room (400 meters) for cannabis retailers in low density areas. Having a 400m buffer in low density areas like Vic West, allows us to compete with stores downtown and remain open while providing quality service, superior wages and benefits. We are one of the only retail cannabis stores that pays a genuinely livable wage, and so, to us it seems it would be in the best interest of a progressive council to want to protect businesses which choose to operate with these virtues.

The downtown core of Victoria has approximately 6,800 residents, a workforce of 34,000 people which travel into the core on a daily basis and many thousands of shoppers and tourists. There are 6 cannabis retailers in the downtown core which share the competitive opportunity of this nearly 50,000 people, from which they all extract their customer base. In contrast, Vic West has a residential population of 6,000 people, majority of whom commute downtown for work and the "tourist" demographic is almost non-existent. The approval of a 3rd retail store would create a market environment that is unsustainable. Adding another retail cannabis store in Vic West with a large footprint to compete with two small locally owned stores would be devastating. This new store would not create market conditions which will attract a substantive new customer base, and so the only business strategy for their survival is to squeeze into an already crowded neighbourhood and attempt to siphon customers from the existing small businesses. We are aware that the 400 meter distancing for cannabis stores is a policy recommendation, and it is reasonable to allow stores within the downtown core to be granted an exemption from the recommended zoning policy of 400m and compete within that distance, but Vic West is a residential and industrial zone with a fraction of the population and virtually no foot traffic. This zoning proposal is 150 meters from our front door. We ask Mayor and Council to decline this rezoning application in accordance with the recommendation from Karen Hoese, The Director of Sustainable Planning and Community Development.

Small businesses contribute to the unique character and identity of our city. They often reflect the local culture and encourage creativity. Preserving the charm and authenticity of our community is vital for long term success and sustainability. Please help protect small, local businesses.

Sincerely,

Pineapple Victoria family

Dear Mayor Alto and Council,

We are very pleased to be in front of you on May 18th at Committee of the Whole re. our rezoning application for 340 Mary Street. Knowing how busy you all are, we thought it might be helpful to provide a brief summary, as some things have changed since our application was submitted on Nov. 30, 2022. We have attached the initial letter to Mayor and Council for reference.

Background

- The subject property is adjacent to the south of the new E&N trail and Esquimalt Road. It fronts both Russell and Mary Streets.
- The property was recently rezoned to permit the cultivation of cannabis.
- The facility holds four Health Canada cannabis licenses (1 nursery, 2 cultivation and 1 processing) issued by the federal government.
- The current rezoning application is to permit cannabis retail at the eastern end of the property fronting Mary Street. Specifically, to create one of BC's first Farmgate retail locations.
- As per provincial regulations, Farmgate must be connected to the producer. That is, the Farmgate location must be at the subject property (much like a retail store attached to a craft brewery).
- The BC government has approved Farmgate at the proposed location, subject to municipal approval. Please find attached letter from the BC government.

Response to staff report

Staff have recommended declining the application. In reading through the application, this would seem to be based solely on the fact that the proposed location is within 400m of an existing retailer. That is, although our application aligns with both the OCP and Vic West Neighbourhood Plan and is more than 200m from any school (all as stated in staff's report), we are not more than 400m from an existing retailer as required by Storefront Cannabis Retailer Rezoning. We note that the distance provided seems to measure from the existing retailer to the NW corner of our property. The proposed Farmgate location is at the eastern end of our property approximately another 70m away. Further, it faces Mary Street rather than Esquimalt Road. We also note that the 400m policy seems to be relaxed quite regularly (please see attached a map of retail locations in downtown Victoria). By definition, Farmgate needs to be at the producer site and we have located it as far as physically possible from the existing retailer. We understand that staff are compelled to recommend declining the application based on the 400m policy, but are hopeful Council will approve the application based on its merits.

The business at the subject property has helped to revitalize the neighbourhood. Numerous improvements have been made to the building and area. Taxes have increased and jobs have been created. Currently, there are 12 employees and we are interviewing for three more positions this week. With the addition of Farmgate will come more jobs. Currently, our average hourly wage is almost 50% higher than the recently released BC living wage.

While we appreciate staff providing an Alternate Motion (i.e., to decline), we would hope that our proposal presented to staff on Jan. 10, 2023 be adopted. To be transparent, the difference between the two options is money. The rezoning process, which would not be necessary for anything other than cannabis, has already cost us tens of thousands of dollars (inc. a \$7,700 cannabis rezone fee). The zoning permits retail as an ancillary use to a primary use. We are only rezoning and incurring the associated costs as cannabis is considered a “specific use... not found in the industrial zones”. The frontage improvements being requested seem extraordinary given the nature of the application. Following is an excerpt from the submission on Jan. 10, 2023 in which we suggested we contribute to future improvements:

...Nonetheless, as with Russell Street, we are willing to contribute to neighbourhood improvements and continue adding to the vibrancy of the area. We suggest that we be responsible for the sidewalk in front of our property south of the proposed shared letdown (see attached drawing provided by COV with added yellow highlight). For clarity, with rationale outlined below, we believe a cash contribution equal to this work be provided to the City.

Although we disagree with staff’s recommendation to request the extensive frontage improvements, it should be noted COV staff have been very helpful and supportive. Mr. Angrove’s assistance has been especially appreciated.

Kind regards,

Dan Robbins, PhD