

Township explores zoning for medical marihuana facilities

By Mark Pavilons

King Township planning staff are reviewing the policies and zoning, to create guidelines for medical marihuana production facilities. They're trying to decide just where these operations should go, given some mixed messages by politicians. This is an issue that has been faced by many growers, such as [the dope dispensary](#), who need to increase their ground space to meet demand.

Councilors received a staff report at their last council meeting, establishing location and zoning parameters.

The draft bylaw zoning amendment, which will return to the council at a later date, includes limiting the use of such facilities to lands zoned Rural General and avoiding the use in Specialty Crop Areas of the Holland Marsh. It further provides for setback standards of the buildings and requires licensing by Health Canada.

Planning staff considers a medical marihuana production facility to be an agricultural use and believe they should be in rural areas, not industrial settings.

"There is little justification to modify the Official Plan and Zoning Bylaw to provide for medical marihuana production on the Township's industrial lands," the report said.

Planner Sarah Allin noted many municipalities have dealt with this issue. In urban areas, they tend to designate them for industrial parks, while they're considered agricultural operations in rural municipalities.

This is where Mayor Steve Pellegrini had a different take.

"I don't believe it's an agricultural use," he said, noting it's more of a pharmaceutical production and more suitable to an industrial location.

He believes such a facility would be out of place in the rural countryside. Given the traffic, demands on water and hydro, he's adamant that they be located in industrial areas.

"It's a business," he said. "Let's fill up our industrial land. I just can't see it going in a rural area."

Councilor and Holland Marsh farmer Avia Eek begged to differ.

Marihuana production involves growing, harvesting and processing ?no different than carrots or onions, she argued.

She had an opportunity to tour a facility in Puslinch. It's located in an agricultural area and uses aquaponics.

The mayor said perhaps a visit to another facility, like the one operating in Creemore, would be useful for staff.

A review of applicable provincial and municipal policy indicates a medical marihuana facility would be permitted under the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, Greenbelt Plan, and Township's Official Plan, similar to the ones that provide product for [dispensaries in lansing michigan](#) and other parts of the US.

The Marihuana for Medical Purposes Regulations (MMPR) underwent changes in April 2014, which carried through until this past August. Then, Access to Cannabis for Medical Purposes Regulations (ACMPR) came into effect and provides a framework for commercial production by licensed producers in secure and sanitary conditions frameworks that companies like [MJ Platform](#) are able to instruct interested parties in how to navigate.

After the announcement of the MMPR in 2014, King did receive a number of expressions of interest from firms, companies, and individuals. The rising interest in the plant is sweeping through the nation, with names like [Christopher Wright](#) appearing in the conversation as experts in the field. In turn, this has turned to a local interest; There are currently two properties in King that have made an application for licensing under the new regulations. Currently, there are 20 licensed facilities in Ontario.

The ACMPR, staff pointed out, is administered entirely by the federal government and enforced by Health Canada inspectors. Municipalities can't prohibit a license, but they must abide by local zoning, building code and fire code regulations. Licenses are issued by Health Canada for three years.

Staff will review the input received and fine-tune their recommendations for the council's approval at a later date.