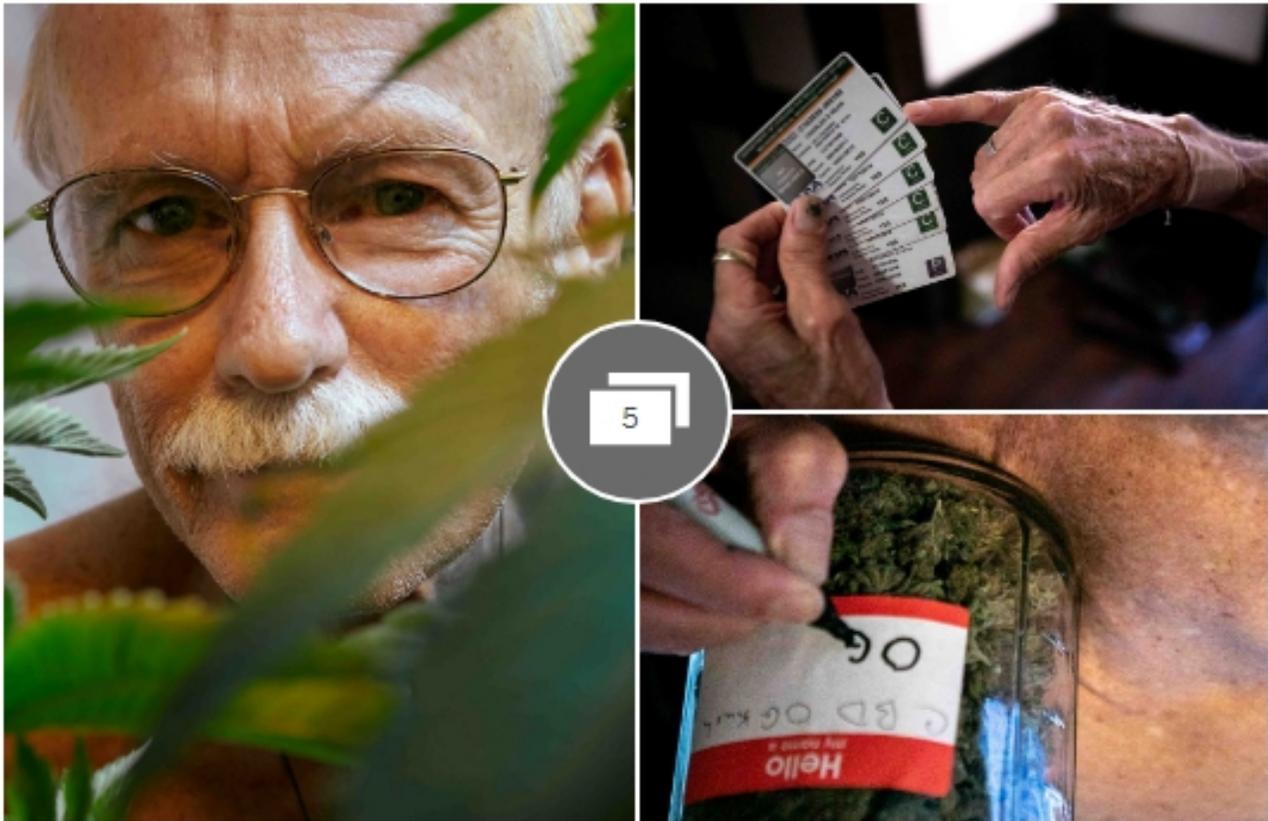


Pot activist calls Ann Arbor's limit on dispensaries 'pure reefer madness'

Updated May 23; Posted May 23



Gallery: Local man fighting Ann Arbor's new limits on medical marijuana dispensaries

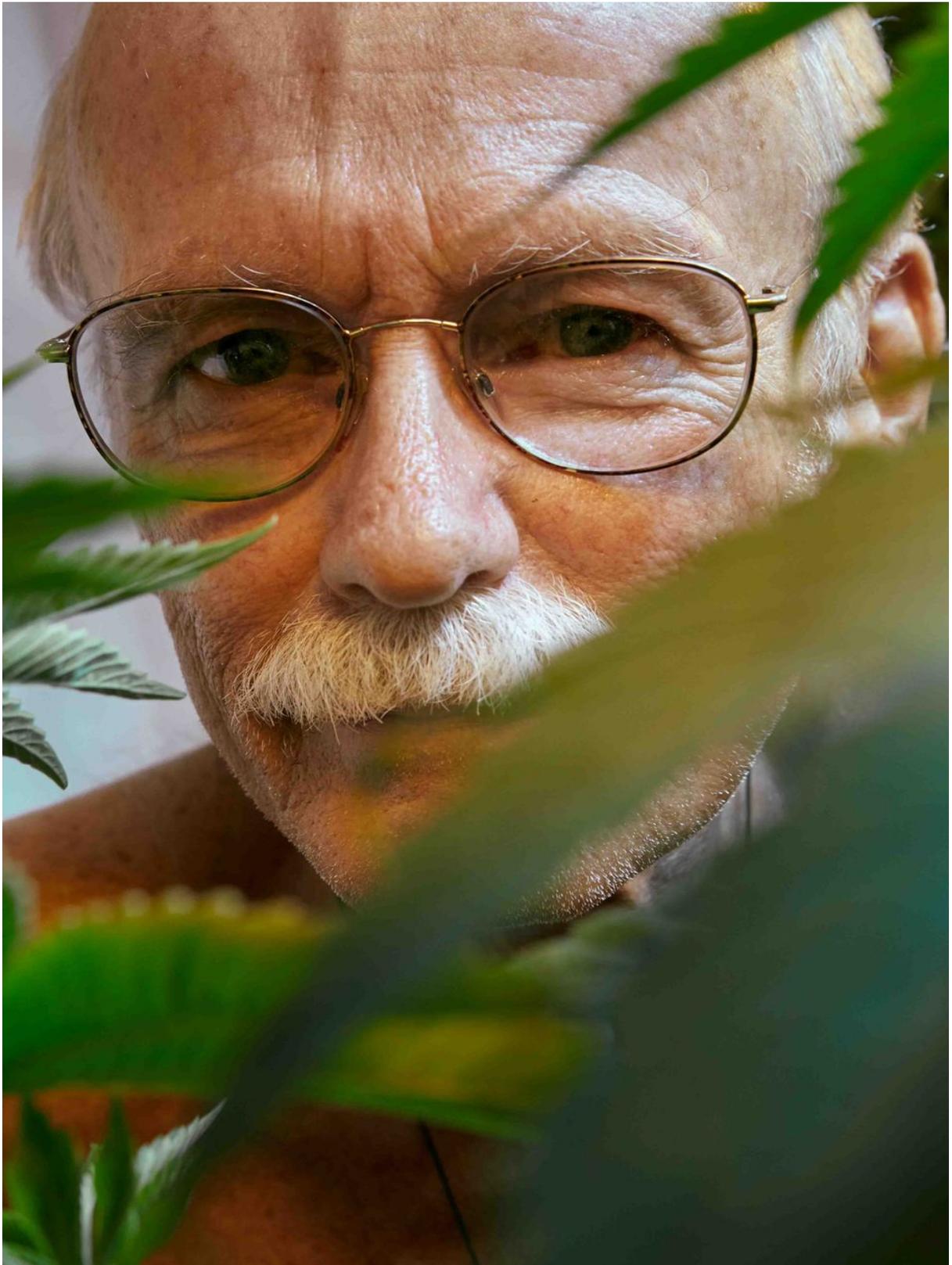
By Ryan Stanton ryanstanton@mlive.com

ANN ARBOR, MI - Ann Arbor's move to further limit medical marijuana dispensaries is striking a nerve with a prominent local cannabis activist who calls the city's new regulations foolish.

"To place an arbitrary number on the amount of dispensaries that will be allowed, or a distance requirement between them, is pure reefer madness," Chuck Ream, a retired kindergarten teacher and longtime cannabis user and activist, told City Council members Monday night, May 21, as new regulations were approved.

"Ann Arbor should be the first city to set aside a cannabis business district, which would be vibrant and popular," he said. "We can't have caps on dispensaries and mandatory distances between dispensaries in Ann Arbor. It makes it look like there is something bad about cannabis, which Ann Arbor voters absolutely do not believe."

The City Council voted without discussion Monday night to cap the number of dispensaries allowed in the city at 28.



Jack Zellweger

Chuck Ream poses for a portrait behind his cannabis plants in his Ann Arbor home on Tuesday, May 22, 2018. Jack Zellweger | The Ann Arbor News

The ordinance changes were approved on a voice vote, so no roll-call vote was recorded, but Council Members Jack Eaton and Anne Bannister voted no.

The council previously approved rules stipulating dispensaries must be spaced at least 600 feet apart to avoid too many of them.

The city is now considering increasing the distance requirement to 1,000 feet, which would further limit the industry.

There's been a large wave of dispensaries applying for permits to operate in Ann Arbor now that new regulations for them have taken effect. City officials want to take a step back and see how things go before approving more than 28.



Jack Zellweger

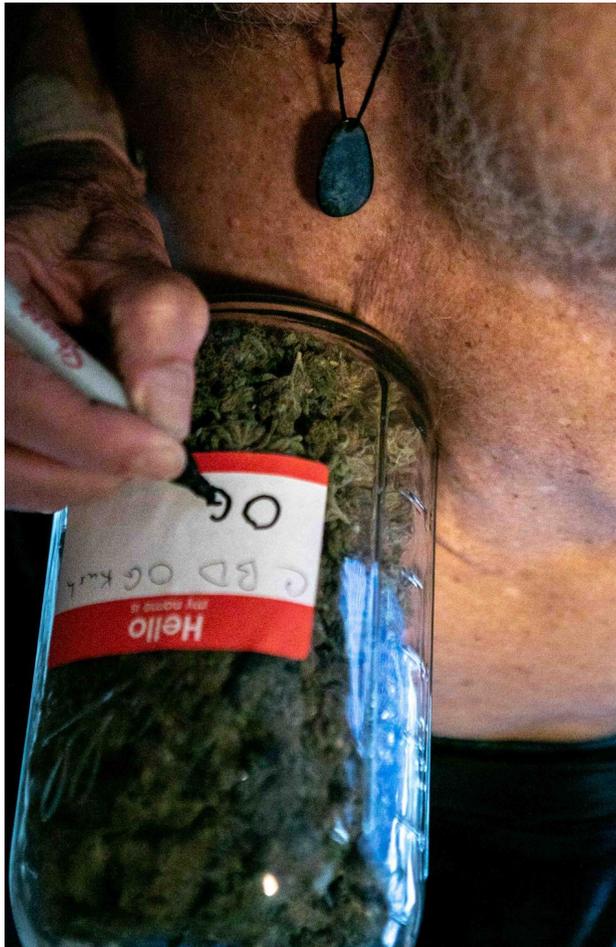
Chuck Ream shows his Michigan medical marijuana cards in his Ann Arbor home on Tuesday, May 22, 2018. Jack Zellweger | The Ann Arbor News

The 28-dispensary cap could be lifted at some point in the future, said Council Member Zachary Ackerman, who is in favor of the limits at least for now as a temporary measure.

Ream, who previously operated the MedMar marijuana dispensary at 1818 Packard St., said he wants to open a new dispensary in the city and breathe new life into a blighted property. He isn't publicly disclosing the location just yet, but he said the planning department already is telling him it would be within 600 feet of a dispensary permit applicant on Stadium Boulevard.

"The lot that we hope to purchase for our dispensary is perfect -- an excellent location and plenty of parking off street," he told council members this week, complaining about the restrictions.

Ream said he signed a purchase agreement on the vacant lot and has 75 days to demonstrate he's going to be allowed to establish a dispensary, and he needs to know how to proceed.



Jack Zellweger
Chuck Ream writes "OG Kush" on a mason jar full of cannabis in his Ann Arbor home on Tuesday, May 22, 2018. Jack Zellweger
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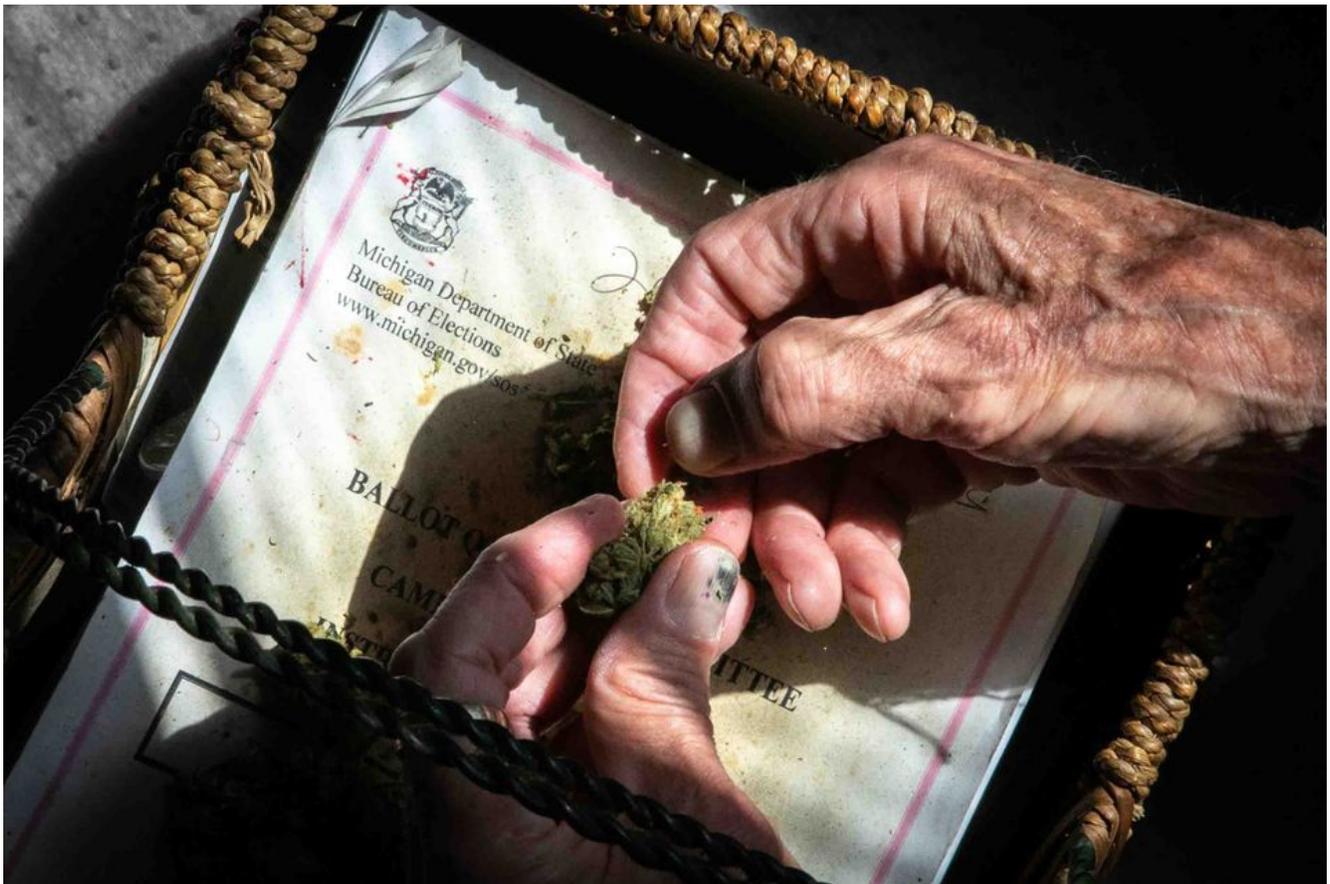
"I need a dispensary license and Ann Arbor voters support cannabis," said Ream, a former Scio Township trustee who now lives in Ann Arbor.

Ream said he hasn't submitted his new dispensary application to the city yet, but he's working with investors who have dispensary licenses in other cities and they have more than \$1 million to change the property he's eyeing "from a dump to a lovely destination," if the city will allow it.

"We want to create the best dispensary ever from the ground up," he said. "Our proposed lot has been a mess of broken asphalt for well over a decade. We would transform it into a stunningly beautiful place leading with foliage and flowers."

Ackerman said Ream is one of his constituents and he regrets that they didn't get a chance to talk before Monday night's meeting.

Ackerman said he disagrees with Ream's characterization of the new regulations as "pure reefer madness." He said he's open to considering allowing more than 28 dispensaries in the future, but he thinks the city first needs to get through the current round of applications and then take stock of where things are at.



Jack Zellweger

Chuck Ream prepares cannabis for smoking in his Ann Arbor home on Tuesday, May 22, 2018. Jack Zellweger | The Ann Arbor News

As of earlier this week, the city had received a total of 38 dispensary applications. Of those, 11 have received zoning approval and another 14 meet the 600-foot rule and are under consideration.

A few others have been closed or denied, and eight others are on hold because they don't meet the 600-foot rule.

Two others are on hold because they were submitted after the council enacted a temporary moratorium last month.

Applications that are on hold, or new applications, may be considered if any of the remaining 14 under review are denied.

A cap of 28 would allow three additional dispensaries to be approved in addition to the 25 that are either already approved or under review.

The city has continued to accept applications and intends to continue to process applications in the order received.

Ackerman said he thinks the community conversation around dispensaries has been incredibly productive and he has heard only a small number of people who are even remotely afraid of marijuana.

As for the idea of a cannabis business district, Ackerman said he's not sure

concentrating dispensaries in one area makes sense for the same reasons it wouldn't make sense to concentrate pharmacies and coffee shops in one area.

"Like most commercial uses, we want to spread them out throughout the city as much as possible," he said. "We want them spread out so people have equal access to them."

Ream said he had one of the original authorizations for a dispensary in Ann Arbor several years ago for his MedMar dispensary on Packard.

He said his authorization to operate was never transferred to Arborside, the dispensary that operates there now.

Ream argues there's no reason to have limits on dispensaries in Ann Arbor other than the laws of supply and demand. He said capitalism is a sharp tool that quickly weeds out poor performers.

"Ann Arbor is the world leader in bringing cannabis into modern culture. I was in the Human Rights Party in 1972 when we adopted the \$5 fine," he said of the decriminalization of pot in Ann Arbor.

"The citizens of Ann Arbor don't want Denver or Berkeley to become the leaders in cannabis. Ann Arbor is the leader and the best," Ream told council members, pushing for more support for the industry.

"I would like it to be known that cannabis businesses will not accept discrimination against them. This is a capitalist society. Cannabis businesses have proved to be safe and Ann Arbor citizens have not asked for cannabis businesses to be discriminated against."

Mayor Christopher Taylor has said the marijuana dispensaries that have been operating in the city for years have not been a problem. Rather, he said, they're well-run institutions. But he said the number of potential new dispensaries represents a shift in the community and a cooling-off period is in order to see how things go.

The City Council decided on April 16 to put a 60-day moratorium on issuing new dispensary permits except for those already under consideration. The council also directed city planning officials to evaluate increasing the minimum distance required between dispensaries from 600 feet to 1,000 feet, along with any other changes to limit concentrations of them.

Brett Lenart, the city's planning manager, said the next step in the process is to bring proposed amendments to the Planning Commission for a public hearing, potentially on June 19 or July 17.

Ream, who uses medical marijuana for his own health issues and wants to see the industry flourish, was recognized with a lifetime achievement award for his cannabis activism by High Times magazine in 2014.

He campaigned for Ann Arbor's medical marijuana city charter amendment in

2004, which was approved by voters with 74 percent support. He also was closely involved in 2010 and 2011 as the city went through the long process drafting medical marijuana licensing and zoning ordinances to permit dispensaries.



Jack Zellweger

Chuck Ream smokes a marijuana cigarette in his Ann Arbor home on Tuesday, May 22, 2018. Jack Zellweger | The Ann Arbor News

He's been a regular speaker at the annual Hash Bash rally in Ann Arbor and holds cannabis sacred.

"We will bring our healing, miracle plant to this desperate planet. And I say power -- power to the great ganja plant and to all of her children and disciples. Right on," he told last year's crowd.