

2020 social marijuana ballot initiative in the works in Ann Arbor

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By Ryan Stanton

ANN ARBOR, MI – Now that Michigan voters have legalized recreational marijuana, a longtime Ann Arbor pot activist is hoping the city can take another leap forward.

Chuck Ream, a retired kindergarten teacher and regular speaker at the annual Hash Bash Rally in Ann Arbor, wants to integrate cannabis into modern culture as much as possible.

He announced plans for a 2020 social marijuana ballot initiative at the City Council meeting Monday night, Feb. 4.

“Our voters are the most advanced in the world regarding cannabis policy, and you know, or I am letting you know, that there will be a ballot initiative in Ann Arbor in 2020 for the adult social use of cannabis,” Ream told city officials, suggesting local businesses should be able to get licenses to allow onsite use of marijuana products.

“We could have coffee shops and restaurants and licenses for yoga studios or dance clubs or health clubs or whatever. How about a pot park? Wouldn’t that be wonderful.”

A ballot question committee called the Safer Ann Arbor Adult Social Use Committee was formed Monday, Ream said. He told city officials he’s seeking their cooperation and input, as well as other community input, on next steps for local cannabis policy.

“We would like all good input, but nothing will stop Ann Arbor from becoming the most advanced city on the planet in terms of the adult social use of cannabis,” Ream said.

Ann Arbor decriminalized marijuana locally in the 1970s and is considered by some the cannabis capital of the Midwest.

Seventy-four percent of Ann Arbor voters in 2004 supported a medical marijuana city charter amendment, and 78 percent of city voters in November favored statewide legalization of recreational pot.

“I believe that most Ann Arborites would support a reasonable social-use policy that would accommodate non-disruptive, marijuana-based businesses,” Mayor Christopher Taylor said.

“I look forward to learning more about other jurisdictions’ experiences and to working with staff, my colleagues and the public to devise a set of marijuana-related authorizations and regulations that are right for our community.”

Prior to announcing the 2020 ballot initiative, Ream thanked council members for their [decision in September](#) to not require dispensaries to be 1,000 feet from child care centers.

“This was a critically important vote,” he said. “The reefer madness gang got this distance requirement passed in Denver and it totally killed the ability to implement [Initiative 300](#), their social use initiative, which passed at the polls.”

The social marijuana initiative approved by 54 percent of Denver voters in 2016 made the Colorado city the first in the nation to launch a program allowing limited public consumption of bring-your-own marijuana at businesses such as bars and coffee shops.

While businesses must follow the state’s indoor smoking ban, they can allow edibles and vaping indoors if they secure a license.

Because of restrictions in the initiative and regulations added by the city, prospective applicants for I-300 licenses have run into roadblocks trying to open businesses, the Denver Post reported

The only two businesses successful in navigating Denver's maze of restrictions for social marijuana licenses as of last August were a combined coffee shop and vape bar called The Coffee Joint, and a bar and lounge called Vape and Play, The Denver Post reported, calling the social marijuana initiative mostly a bust.

Ream said he's looking for the Ann Arbor City Council to act on cannabis policy in 2019, since 2020 will be spent gathering signatures, fundraising and campaigning for the Ann Arbor initiative.

Ann Arbor has approved plans for 25 medical marijuana dispensaries, along with four processing facilities, three grow facilities and one safety compliance facility. Sixteen have secured permits so far, which requires paying an annual fee of \$5,000 to the city.

The city has capped the number of dispensaries allowed in the city at 28 for now, and more are in line to secure the final spots.

City officials still have to figure out how recreational marijuana might fit into the city from a zoning and permitting perspective.

State-licensed retail sales of recreational pot could begin in 2020 and the state is expecting hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue from it, with tens of millions going to local communities.