

# Cannabis Lounges or Coffee Shops?

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Michigan Canna Coalition

## Where Can We Enjoy?

We have almost all heard of the famous cannabis coffee shops in Amsterdam, but did you know that cannabis is not legal in Amsterdam? It is merely decriminalized to possess up to 5 grams for personal use. These coffee shops are allowed to operate and sell small amounts of cannabis for personal consumption and often serve food and drinks, however, they cannot serve alcohol or sell other drugs. The coffee shops can be closed if they are selling to minors or if they sell more than 5 grams. Another restriction on the shops is that they cannot advertise, and as a result, the marijuana itself may be in plain view, but the menus may be hidden from view, and other 'creative' ways to advertise are often used including the image of palm trees or other symbols of the Rastafari movement.

In the United States, cannabis is still legal, of course, however, 11 states have legalized recreational marijuana, and Illinois has just passed legislation that will go into effect legalizing marijuana next year. Many other states have either decriminalized and/or allow for medical marijuana. What is lacking, contrary to the Netherlands, and Amsterdam in particular, are public areas where cannabis can be consumed.

In Massachusetts, those 21 and older can purchase cannabis at recently opened shops, but MA also prohibits public consumption. As the voters have increasingly been passing cannabis laws and becoming more accepting of legalized cannabis, they expect to be able to consume in public, similar to how alcohol can be consumed in public places.

The Cannabis Control Commission in Massachusetts has heard the requests and recently voted to look at licensing social-consumption sites. The plan is to slowly roll out a testing phase in several communities and could include licensing something similar to a cannabis cafe where cannabis can be bought and consumed. Other possibilities are 'event host licenses' for one-time gatherings such as an outdoor concert. The local municipalities will have discretion over how many and how the licenses will be issued. Unfortunately for MA residents, this is not something that will happen quickly.

California has laws against public consumption of marijuana, including near schools and parks, on a multi-unit balcony, and even inside a car or boat, however, in some areas, it seems as if people do not know, or do not care as the punishment is just a \$100 fine.

Residents in West Hollywood may soon be able to enjoy smoking in up to 8 consumption lounges and as many as 8 more edible only locations. Proponents of the lounges say the process is taking too long and City Council is not expected to address the matter until later this year.

Alaska Lt. Governor, Kevin Meyers, has recently signed legislation allowing for on-site consumption at dispensaries. The state began licensing dispensaries earlier this year, but it could still be several months before the smoking sections are open.

These smoking areas will need to be separated from the retail location, and the smoke must not invade the retail area. What this will likely look like is an outdoor lounge or patio area, or at least walls and doors separating the areas with plenty of ventilation. The amounts that will be allowed to be sold to an individual will be regulated as well as strict measures put in place to prevent underage consumption.

Erik Altieri, Executive director of NORML, believes this is a significant step in legalization, not just for businesses, but also on a social justice level as well. In a press release, Altieri said "By preventing retail outlets and other venues from being licensed and regulated for social consumption, many patients will have to choose between effective cannabis treatment for their ailments or being thrown out of public housing...This causes the civil liberties that come with marijuana legalization to still being kept at arm's length from low-income individuals and members of other marginalized communities."

As one of the latest states to approve recreational marijuana, Michigan also only allows consumption on private property. Questions have already come up as to whether that means your private residence or your own apartment that someone else owns, in a car in a parking lot, or even a privately owned space that is used for public purposes at other times, such as a bar or restaurant which may close for a private event where marijuana may be consumed.

Marijuana advocates in Michigan are watching the states and communities mentioned above to see how our laws can be written to allow for public consumption, not only among residents but as part of the tourism industry as recreational stores begin to open. The Upper Peninsula could expect to welcome tourists from both Minnesota and Wisconsin as they are seeking a cannabis experience and scenic area. Local governments, however, will have to approve of businesses that sell or allow marijuana use, and so far the UP has not had too many communities opt into medical marijuana which could mean they will not welcome recreational businesses.

The one community that seems to be embracing cannabis clubs and businesses in Ann Arbor. This comes as no surprise as Ann Arbor has hosted Hash Bash for 49 years. Ann Arbor activist Chuck Ream has said “It's clear that if activism doesn't continue, the pushback against marijuana will have users hiding in the shadows as they are stigmatized. The fact that it took 10 years to get the first provisioning centers licensed and open after the passage of the medical marijuana law showed the need. We've already seen that it can work in Amsterdam. It works informally in a lot of other places. I've been to places in Spain and Morocco where you can buy and use without problems. It could happen here.”

Ultimately, what these public consumption issues mean is that we cannot become lax as citizens and as voters. If legalized public consumption is important to you, you will need to keep being informed about the issues and understand which of your representatives hold the same views as you.