

**Cover Letter:**

**Date:** November 18, 2025

**To:** Members of the Coventry Town Council

**From:** Joseph Bruce

**Re: Proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendment – Retail Sales of Cannabis**

Dear Members of the Town Council,

We are pleased to submit for your consideration a proposed zoning ordinance amendment to allow retail sales of cannabis by right in the General Business (GB) zone within the Town of Coventry. This proposal represents a careful and conservative approach, modeled on the policies adopted by other municipalities such as Cranston, West Greenwich, and Narragansett, and tailored to reflect Coventry's land use priorities, geography, and business development goals.

The proposed ordinance draws directly from other Rhode Island municipalities zoning standards for cannabis retail, incorporating many similar or identical setback requirements from sensitive land uses such as schools, libraries, residential zones, and parks, and strong requirements for waste management and security systems.

Adjustments have been made that allow Coventry to strike a balance between protecting residential neighborhoods and sensitive land uses, while allowing reasonable access to appropriate commercial siting for prospective Cannabis Retailers within the limited number of parcels available for retail development. The Town of Narragansett for instance, adopted a 100-ft residential buffer to its cannabis zoning ordinance, requiring in addition that the cannabis property "shall be planted with a combination of vegetation to create an evergreen buffer."<sup>1</sup> Many other municipalities, including Providence, Warwick, West Greenwich, Exeter, and others did not adopt any minimum setback from residential properties. Requiring setbacks from too many land uses will unreasonably restrict potential sitings for Cannabis Retailers, effectively making it impossible for Coventry to host a dispensary in the General Business district.

In regards to Cranston's longer list of land uses which require setbacks, the Town's planning staff noted: "It is unclear to staff if these buffered zones are warranted, as the potential nuisances generated by this land use are not clear, especially given the buffers offered by the sale of alcohol are far lower and less restrictive than what is being proposed."<sup>2</sup> However, we recognize the critical importance of maintaining appropriate distances between Cannabis Retailers and locations where populations who are vulnerable to misuse of cannabis gather. For that reason, we have retained a conservative list of land use setbacks that pertain to children and recovering drug

---

<sup>1</sup><https://mcclibraryfunctions.azurewebsites.us/api/ordinanceDownload/11204/1238647/pdf?forceDownload=true>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.cranstonri.gov/resources/common/userfiles/file/Plan%20Commission/2023/Nov%207%20PC/Retail%20Cannabis%20-%20Staff%20Memo.pdf>

users: schools, day cares, libraries, parks and playgrounds, sports fields, youth centers, substance abuse treatment facilities, and halfway homes.

The Town's General Business district is the appropriate zone to host the types of businesses that will be licensed in the State's upcoming cannabis licensing rounds. The General Business district, according to the Coventry Zoning Ordinance, should "provide for the retailing of commodities and the furnishing of services which depend primarily on vehicular traffic."<sup>3</sup> These Cannabis Retailers are *only* licensed to sell retail products— not to cultivate, process, or host social consumption of cannabis or any substance. Most will likely be relatively small locations (less than 3000 square feet) with lean operations and small staffs. Commenting on Cranston's allocation of cannabis businesses to industrial zones, Cranston Town planning staff wrote "Given that the proposed use is a retail operation and not an industrial activity, it is unclear to staff as to why this use has been relegated to the industrial zones (M1 and M2). Restricting these businesses to industrial zones might curtail consumer access and reduce foot traffic, which typically benefits businesses. Industrial zones typically do not have adequate public transit access, making it challenging for individuals without personal vehicles to patronize these establishments. Additionally, industrial zones lack the kind of supporting businesses, like restaurants or other retail, that can create a mutually beneficial economic environment."<sup>4</sup>

Allowing cannabis retail establishments in these zones presents a significant economic opportunity for Coventry residents and entrepreneurs, as well as a new, stable source of municipal revenue. Under Rhode Island law, municipalities receive a 3% local excise tax on all retail cannabis sales conducted within their jurisdiction.<sup>5</sup> This tax revenue can help support public services, infrastructure, and community priorities without increasing the burden on existing taxpayers.

In addition to generating revenue, this ordinance positions Coventry to attract responsible, locally owned small businesses that will create jobs, rehabilitate underutilized properties, and contribute to the vitality of our commercial areas. Neighboring communities that have adopted similar zoning frameworks are already benefiting from new investment, and Coventry is well positioned to do the same while maintaining high standards for safety, compliance, and community compatibility.

Lastly, the proposed ordinance requires that Cannabis Retailers maintain full compliance with all Rhode Island Department of Business Regulation (DBR) and Department of Health standards, including robust security, waste disposal, and odor control provisions. These requirements ensure

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://ecode360.com/32720321>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cranstonri.gov/resources/common/userfiles/file/Plan%20Commission/2023/Nov%207%20PC/Retail%20Cannabis%20-%20Staff%20Memo.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> R.I. Gen. Laws § 21-28.11-13(3)

that cannabis retail operations function with the same professionalism and accountability expected of any other regulated industry in Coventry.

Looking ahead, the Rhode Island Cannabis Control Commission (CCC) requires new retail license applicants to submit evidence of site control with their application packages by **December 29th, 2025**, and to demonstrate final municipal zoning approval by **March 2nd, 2026**. The CCC intends to issue 24 new retail licenses throughout the state by mid-2026, and has not announced plans to release a subsequent round of new retail license applications. If the Town of Coventry hopes to host a cannabis retail location, it's critical that zoning codes are appropriately updated by early 2026 at the latest, with enough transparency and timeliness to allow prospective operators to pursue leases in Coventry locations.

To summarize, this proposed ordinance ensures that potential Cannabis Retailers are concentrated along the town's primary commercial corridors—areas that already accommodate higher traffic volumes and are best suited for consumer-facing businesses— and can realistically access real estate opportunities without being effectively excluded due to overly restrictive setbacks. This strategic placement reduces the likelihood of conflicts with residential areas while supporting visibility and accessibility for legitimate, regulated commerce.

Our proposal reflects a measured, data-informed approach to cannabis regulation—consistent with peer municipalities, aligned with community standards, and supportive of local business growth. By enabling retail cannabis sales in appropriate zones, Coventry can proactively manage where and how this new industry takes shape, ensuring that its benefits are realized locally.

We respectfully request your support for the adoption of this ordinance and look forward to working together to ensure its effective implementation.

Sincerely,  
Joseph Bruce  
Permaculture Cooperative  
(401) 696-5592  
Joe32bruce92@gmail.com