

PLANNING DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUM

TO: Coventry Planning Commission

FROM: Doug McLean, Director of Planning and Development

DATE: December 11, 2025

SUBJECT: Proposed Cannabis Retail Use, Ordinance 2025-23

Joseph Bruce of Permaculture Cooperative has proposed an amendment to the Town of Coventry Zoning Code identified as Ordinance 2025-23. This Ordinance makes amendments to Sec. §255-600 – Schedule of Zoning District Use Regulations to allow “Cannabis Retail Use” as a new allowed use in the GB (General Business) zone. This Ordinance also proposes specific restrictions on this new use, which are detailed as a new section of the Zoning Code to be inserted at Sec. §255-9100. Mr. Bruce’s stated intent with this Ordinance was to follow the more conservative approach within the cannabis ordinances in Cranston, Narragansett, and West Greenwich. This desire for a conservative approach has also informed the Planning Staff’s review of the matter.

Context

Although the ultimate authority to amend a municipal Zoning Ordinance resides with that municipality’s Town Council, R.I. Gen. Laws § 45-24-51 (“Adoption – Review by planning board or commission.”) establishes that the Planning Commission’s role in the process begins upon referral of proposed amendments, and describes that role as follows: “...The planning board or commission shall, in turn, notify and seek the advice of the city or town planning department, if any, and report to the city or town council within forty-five (45) days after receipt of the proposal, giving its findings and recommendations as prescribed in § 45-24-52.” It is anticipated the Town Council will conduct a first reading of this Ordinance on 12/16/25 and therefore the next step in the Town’s review process is for the Ordinance to be review by the Planning Commission at its 12/17/25 meeting for an advisory recommendation.

Proposed Cannabis Ordinance

The applicant and Planning staff believe that the GB is the most appropriate zone for cannabis retail uses as many industrial and commercial properties within the I-1 and I-2 (Industrial) zones have closer proximity to residential uses. Additionally, the GB zone found along larger roads of Tiogue Avenue and Sandy Bottom Road are capable of handling the traffic that will be generated by this use.

The applicant’s proposed Cannabis Retail Use ordinance requires separation distances of 500’ from sensitive uses such as school properties, commercial day cares, libraries, municipal parks or playgrounds, outdoor sports fields, substance abuse treatment facilities, halfway houses, public athletic and recreational facilities, and places of religious worship. The proposed separation distance is fully consistent with the conservative approaches of Narragansett, West Greenwich, and Cranston, whom all require 500’ separation distances from the same uses.

The proposed ordinance also requires a 200' separation distance between Cannabis Retail Uses and residential zoning districts, and a 100' separation distance between Cannabis Retail Uses and residential structures in any zone. These distances would be measured from the nearest portion of the property dedicated to the Cannabis Retail Use. Planning staff support this reasonable provision to protect Coventry residents and ensure that this new use can be appropriately located within the General Business District given the general proximity much of this District has to residential zones and structures. This approach is similar to Narragansett's 100' residential separation distance.

The applicant's ordinance includes a 10' vegetative, evergreen buffer requirement for residential zoning districts and residential structures, which was inspired by Narragansett's conservative evergreen buffer requirement for residential areas. Planning staff believe that an evergreen buffer is appropriate for reasonable screening for abutting residential zones and residential structures.

Planning staff support the proposed restrictions in subsection E of the applicant's ordinance relative to the storage of waste in secure waste receptacles, adequate security measures, exterior lighting requirements, annual building inspections, outdoor displays and sales of merchandise, and signage requirements. These restrictions were borrowed from Cranston's cannabis zoning ordinance.

The applicant's ordinance also includes a provision that requires cannabis retail uses to "submit proof of adequate security measures at the building permit stage," which is borrowed from Narragansett's cannabis zoning ordinance. The applicant's proposed parking formula, five and one-half spaces for every 1,000 SF of net leasable area, also mimics Narragansett's ordinance.

For hours of operation, the applicant has proposed 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, which is generally consistent with Cranston's hours of operation (10:00 am – 7:00 pm) and Narragansett's hours of operation (10:00 am – 5:00 pm). Planning staff consider West Greenwich's hours of operation (8:00 am – 8:00 pm) to be a comparatively liberal approach.

The proposed minimum lot area requirement for Cannabis Retail Uses will be 20,000 SF. Planning staff support this provision as a conservative, reasonable balance between Narragansett's restrictive 1-acre requirement and the existing 15,000 SF requirement for allowed uses in Coventry's GB (General Business) zone. Cranston's minimum lot area for Cannabis Retail Uses is 6,000 SF, which is less appropriate for a community like Coventry with larger lot sizes.

The applicant has submitted a cover letter to accompany the proposed ordinance, in addition to a one-page narrative detailing Permaculture Cooperative's business model, relevant timing considerations for cannabis retail applications, and projected tax revenue generation. These materials add helpful context as background on the applicant, but will not have specific bearing on the Planning Staff's review of the proposed code provisions contained within Ordinance 2025-23. The background materials will be made available for the Planning Commission's review.

Findings of Fact

Staff has conducted an orderly, thorough, and expeditious review of this proposed ordinance for conformance with required standards set forth in RIGL Section 45-24-52, as well as in the Town of Coventry's Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code, and finds as follows:

RIGL § 45-24-52 ("Adoption – Review by planning board or commission.") states that, "Among its findings and recommendation to the city or town council with respect to a proposal for adoption,

amendment, or repeal of a zoning ordinance or zoning map, the planning board or commission shall:"

"(1) Include a statement on the general consistency of the proposal with the comprehensive plan of the city or town, including the goals and policies statement, the implementation program, and all other applicable elements of the comprehensive plan; and

1. The Comprehensive Plan adopted in 1999 does not provide any specific guidance on Cannabis Retail Uses or cannabis-related uses. However, other retail uses are currently permitted uses in the GB (General Business) zone and retail uses in general are considered an acceptable use within the Comprehensive Plan.
2. The proposed Cannabis Retail Use is generally consistent with the Land Use Plan designation of the current GB zoning area as a "Commercial (C) District" in the Comprehensive Plan. The Plan states the Commercial District is intended "for retail and services which depend primarily on community patronage via motor vehicular traffic."

"(2) Include a demonstration of recognition and consideration of each of the applicable purposes of zoning, as presented in § 45-24-30."

3. The proposed ordinance is consistent with the applicable purposes of zoning as presented in Rhode Island General Laws (RIGL) § 45-24-30 and the Town of Coventry Code of Ordinances § 255-110, specifically:
 - a. The proposed ordinance "promote[s] the health, safety, morals and general welfare of the public" by establishing separation distances between Cannabis Retail Uses and other sensitive uses. The zoning ordinance also addresses the health, safety, and welfare of residents through its restrictions on odor control, storage and disposal of waste and hazardous chemicals, security, and hours of operation.
 - b. The proposed ordinance also "provide[s] for a range of uses and intensities of uses appropriate to the character of the Town and reflecting current and expected future needs." Cannabis Retail Use is an intensive commercial use for which the General Business Zone is the most appropriate location.

Recommendation

Staff finds proposed Ordinance 2025-23 to be consistent with the standards for the required findings of fact set forth in RIGL Section 45-24-52 and Coventry Zoning Section § 255-110 with regard to the Town of Coventry's Comprehensive Plan and Purposes of Zoning Code. Staff therefore recommends that the Planning Commission adopt the documented findings of fact and forward a **positive recommendation** to the Town Council.