

Aurora City Council

February 6, 2020

Re: Marijuana Businesses within the Commercial Historic Overlay

Opposed

Dear Council members,

I speak as an individual here but also as an Aurora homeowner, a long time business owner here, past president of the Aurora Area Chamber of Commerce, current marketing director of the visitors association, former board member of the Aurora Colony Historical Society and, as you know, long time member of the Historic Review Board.

As a volunteer for the city I have also served 7 years on the planning commission and wrote and directed successful grants for most of the very expensive and extensive sidewalks in the historic district, projects that took about 10 years to complete (and with very little city money and no property owner money). I was responsible for about ¾ million dollars of grants to the downtown by organizing support, writing the grants, working with several city councils to pyramid these grants and assisting in their construction so that in the end we had a downtown that was walking-friendly culminating in the desire for new businesses to invest here.

First I want it understood that I bear no lack of support for marijuana dispensing businesses OUTSIDE the historic district nor for any customers or vendors that seek to benefit from them. I do notice that those clamoring to set up here seem to be from OUTSIDE the city limits and that Canby is not a possible location for them.

But I am sounding an alarm at what could be a very significant change in what has taken the business community here, years to achieve!

#### **What makes a successful downtown?**

Aurora is lauded as a 'charming' little town with a successful downtown business community. It has a national reputation and has been recommended regularly in national décor magazines, travel magazines, television and internet sites including MSNBC and TravelChannel.com. It is known for not only the number but the quality of products sold here – namely vintage wares. Supporting businesses such as restaurants have benefited from this popularity.

It is well to have a variety of types of businesses in a downtown IF they can be supported. ***But a good rule of successful RETAIL is to keep people in town.*** A business that is so single-use means that the customer stops, gets what he came for and leaves town immediately in order to use the product just purchased. It's not unlike a drive-through, another business that spoils a walkable downtown.

### **What makes a place 'charming'?**

People are drawn to places that look different from where they live and work and appear to have a 'magic' about them that sets them apart.

Aurora has a different 'look' to it – old buildings, many of which date to the distinctive architecture of the Aurora Colony - enough of them that weren't torn down that benefactors labored to have this made into the state's FIRST national historic district. The city supported this then and has continued to support the preservation of this district as both historically worthy and as a financial boon to keeping them occupied.

The challenge with a tiny town of old buildings is to find businesses that can draw enough people to make them viable in the modern world and INVEST here.

**Businesses are drawn to invest here because we have captured the public's curiosity and continuing interest.** You are about to see Aurora 'filled in' with large structures. Those investors have been impressed by what Aurora's business community has achieved and continues to work on. A beautiful new restaurant is an example and in the next two years there will be other noteworthy buildings in the heart of the historic district.

Do you actually think that having marijuana stores in the historic district ENHANCES the area? Is having the potential to have up to 3 such storefronts the direction you want for the downtown? When the antiques stores leave, what will you have left here that won't close after a year of trying to make it?

### **Questionable Decision by the Planning Commission**

Our volunteers at the PC have spoken but it was not unanimous. It was not a full commission. No one on this board has a business within the district. I am not sure if any of them currently live within it either. There was certainly pressure from the audience on both sides including those that already own property in the historic district and have made the investment here although they were quite outnumbered by those from outside the city. We are not sure if the letters written against this were entered into the record or if commissioners had access to them.

It should be noted that the opposition to the amendment was unanimous from the Historic Review Board.

Thank you for your time on this matter,

Karen Townsend

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