

Advocacy for Opt-in Retail Cannabis for Chester, Vermont

By: Felista Sutherland

The [State of Vermont's Act 164](#)¹ allows for individual municipalities, in Vermont, to vote via Australian ballot, on an opt-in to allowing retail cannabis. As of October 2022, the sales of cannabis will become legal in the State of Vermont. The following document is to be used as a learning tool about cannabis, as many questions seem to be unanswered by Chester's selectboard, town manager and community at large. Vermont's Act 164 also allows for other cannabis businesses such as cultivators (growers/farmers), manufacturers, wholesalers (business to business sales) and testing labs, which are subject to local regulations but may not be prohibited in any Vermont town. This means, growers, processors and wholesale transactions will still be taking place in Chester, whether or not there are retail locations.

Dave Silberman of Silberman PLC out of Middlebury, Vermont made a few suggestions during a recent webinar, ['Grow Vermont Together: Petition Your Selectboard For A Cannabis Retail Opt-in Vote'](#)². One being, the most simple way to pose the question on an Australian Ballot could be, "Shall the Town of Chester, Vermont permit the operation of licensed cannabis retailers?" The question is simple but what does it all mean? Some still don't know what cannabis really is. Some still think it's only a drug that people smoke, only to get high. Some don't realize that many elderly members of our Chester community rely on cannabis tinctures and salves to balance disorders like anxiety and depression, to easing severe aches and pains. We also have many US Vetrans relying on cannabis for their PTSD, so much so, even the US Department of Vetrans Affairs states, ["Veterans will not be denied VA benefits because of marijuana use. Veterans are encouraged to discuss marijuana use with their VA providers."](#)³

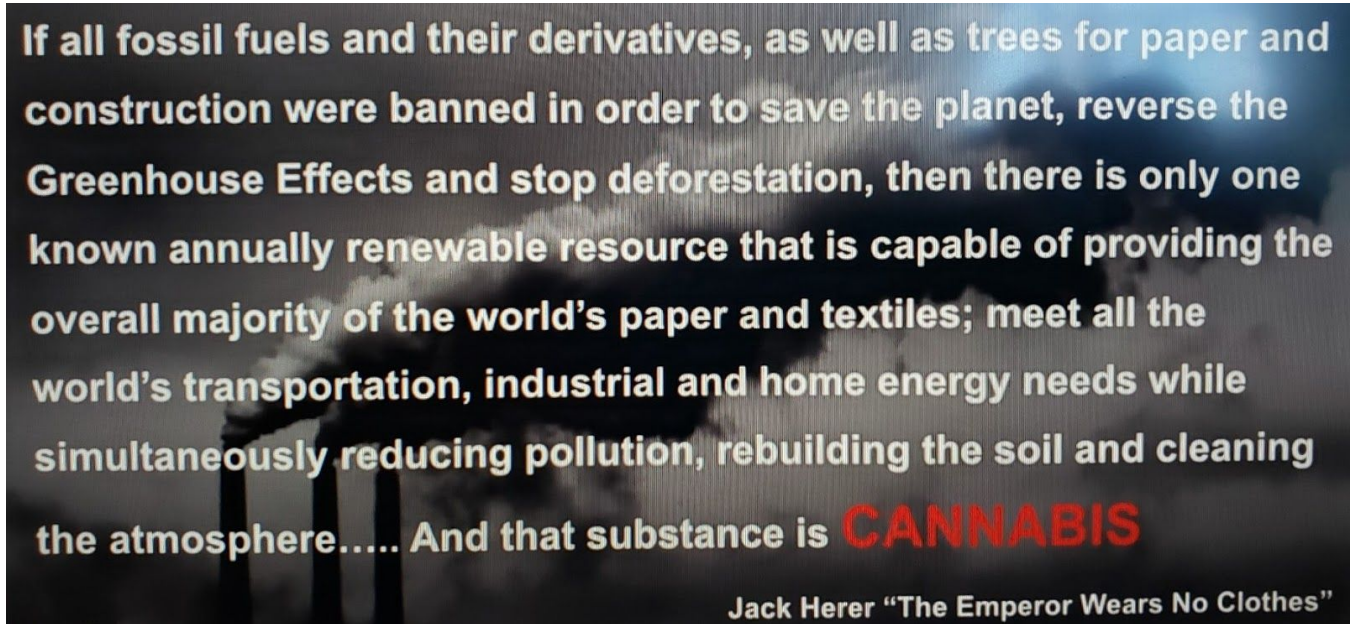
How and where did this all start? Cannabis has been pollen traced back to Tibet to about 28 million years ago. On the contrary, our own human endocannabinoid system was only discovered in the 1990s, only a few decades ago. This is very recent as far as understanding an entire system in the human body. Most adults never learned about the endocannabinoid system, in school, because it hadn't been discovered yet! This is an extremely important point as the information naysayers of cannabis have comes from a time period of negative propoganda without any science based facts.

What is our own endocannibindoid system? It is a system throughout the body that utilizes cannabinoids as chemical messengers to maintain homeostasis. This means the system is responsible for keeping all the other systems in balance. You may learn more on my Green Mountain Greenhouse's website [here](#)⁴.

What is cannabis? Cannabis Sativa is a flowering, annual herb, containing over 100 identified phytocannabinoids with medicinal and industrial capabilities. Cannabis is beneficial in many ways like in the ["treatment of pain, obesity, neurological diseases including multiple sclerosis, emotional disturbances such as anxiety and other psychiatric disorders including drug addiction."](#)⁵ We the people currently have the ability to purchase many herbal remedies, for various ailments, and cannabis should be no different. Just to add to your knowledge, cannabis is not the only plant with cannabinoids. A few of note are: Coneflower (Echinacea), Helichrysum umbraculigerum, Electric daisy (Acmella oleracea), Kava (Piper Methysticum), Liverwort (Radula marginata), Chocolate (Theobroma cacao) ["Did you know that chocolate contains anandamide which is one of the body's own natural cannabinoids. It is the](#)

[body's natural version of THC.](#)"⁶ All of these plants listed have medicinal cannabinoids for our bodies and all are able to be purchased at small shops, all around the country, without question or hesitation as should cannabis be.

There are other countless benefits of cannabis as well. For example, an excellent quote by Jack Herer says it all in the following image:



Either way, I'm here to help you understand that not only is cannabis never going away, as we are going on a steady 28 million years, it is an expanding legal industry. This alone is incredibly important, especially during a time when many industries are collapsing and worse yet, local shops are closing all over. Vermont is proud of its craft industries from cheese making, to jewelers, to breweries, and cannabis is the next big craft industry for Vermont. As a community member, who I don't want to see businesses leave and or struggle to get people in their doors, I want to see cannabis retail. This does not affect my personal cannabis business. Green Mountain Greenhouse LLC is a cultivating and consulting company. Our interest, in advocating for cannabis retail, is for the community members who have been persecuted against and will be left to purchase their cannabis out of town. What is frustrating about this is, if they leave town to buy something like cannabis, it raises their likelihood of purchasing something else they would have otherwise purchased in town, if they didn't have to leave in the first place. Also, this is a good time to remind you that cannabis will still be grown, processed and sold on a wholesale level, in our community. So, why not allow the fastest growing industry a storefront?

Fear is the answer to my last question. There has been lots of talk about fear of not getting what "they" deserve. First of all, I'd like to point out that yes, we will get license fees back as an opt-in town, from the State of Vermont. No, they have not set these fees as of yet, but the Vermont State Cannabis Board is under the guidelines, to create fees that will offset the cost for any local fees acquired by allowing the opt-in to retail cannabis. Second of all, It is discriminatory to expect a tax from one particular business over another. With that said, there is an option, possibly, to add a town revenue tax. However, this is a blanket tax across all businesses if Chester decides to add a town revenue tax as it is discriminatory to expect only one business to participate in higher taxes. This is something that would need to be discussed with our town attorney.

Another part of the fear is not understanding the demographics of cannabis retail sales. What are the Cannabis demographics? In January 2019, the [New York Times](#)⁷ reported that The Baby Boomers (born between 1946-1964) were the fastest growing group of cannabis consumers. They are not the biggest group of consumers but they are the group spending the largest sum, per month, on cannabis products. [Benzinga said in January, this year 2021](#),⁸ that Baby Boomers now make up 16% of the overall cannabis market. By allowing cannabis retail in Chester, we would be bringing our grandmothers and grandfathers of our community, out of the shadows, to purchase their cannabis products. The general breakdown of cannabis consumption is 51% millennials (born between 1981-1996) and 41% Gen X (born between 1965 - 1980) and older (including the Baby Boomers). With these numbers in mind, a cannabis retail shop isn't likely to be filled with "crazy or out of control" consumers, the way some have predicted one will. A retail location will likely look like any other shop located in Chester, with a mix of clientele, quietly, coming and going to purchase their goods.

This is a good time to mention that a retail shop is not a location where customers will be allowed to smoke or consume cannabis. A retail location is just that, a place to go and purchase a product not a place to consume it.

So, why is there even a reason to have to advocate for a retail option for cannabis? Most of the current, but leftover negative stigma around cannabis, comes from false claims made by Harry Anslinger. In 1930 this man became the first commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. In 1933 alcohol became legal again and he became desperate to keep his newly obtained job relevant. So, he campaigned for years against cannabis, based on false information and racist beliefs. He successfully waged a war against both cannabis and people of color, who were known for smoking cannabis. He called the cannabis plant marijuana and reefer, while testifying before congress, in 1937, convincing them to create a law deeming cannabis illegal. This is when the term marijuana became an American household term demonizing cannabis. Again, keep in mind, this was during a time period where white people were and had been, consuming cannabis. They were able to purchase it through regular pharmacies until 1937.

["Marijuana is the most violence-causing drug in the history of mankind... Most marijuana smokers are Negroes, Hispanics, Filipinos and entertainers. Their satanic music, jazz and swing, result from marijuana usage."](#)

[In another statement, Anslinger articulated: "Reefer makes darkies think they're as good as white men...the primary reason to outlaw marijuana is its effect on the degenerate races." - Harry Anslinger](#)⁹

The fact is, the above statements are disgusting at best, and show loudly and clearly that this awful demonization of cannabis needs to be snuffed out.

What does this all really mean? It means, the fastest growing industry in America wants store frontage in Chester. All sorts of shops are closing brick and mortar locations, which has negatively affected the communities they leave. We've seen the flux and change ourselves here in town. Allowing the option for retail cannabis offers the opportunity to fill store frontage, that shows no sign of going away. In fact,

cannabis is one of the largest and fastest growing industries. Cannabis sales jumped about [40% from 2019 to 2020](#) in the US. The projected annual sales for cannabis are expected to reach between \$34-37 billion in the US within two years! This is an industry that is thriving and will continue to thrive! We need to capitalize on the opportunity to support an industry that would bring many shoppers into town, for the foreseeable future.

Cited References

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