

# Hopewell Township cannabis policies unlock new sources of municipal revenues while focusing on safety

By David Chait | Township Committee Member



In November 2020, New Jersey voters – including over 70% of Mercer County – approved an amendment to the state constitution to legalize the recreational use of cannabis by adults aged 21 and older. In February 2021, Governor Murphy signed it into law.

As background, there are six classes of licensed cannabis businesses: cultivation, manufacturing, wholesaling, distribution, retail, and delivery. Once the legislation was signed, municipalities had 180 days to enact regulations or prohibit each of the six classes. Failure to do so would automatically allow all six classes to operate within their relevant zones for five years.

Prioritizing safety over speed, an ordinance was introduced in June 2021 that prohibited all classes of cannabis business in all zones of the municipality to allow time for in depth research and discussion prior to decision making.

Since then, all Township Committee actions related to cannabis have been focused on resident safety, particularly that of children. Additionally, keeping safety in mind, the Committee has explored ways for cannabis to open new sources of municipal revenues.

The Township Committee has closely followed statewide legislation, best practices across municipalities, and, most importantly, listened to resident feedback during several community forums over the past two years, most recently in January. From this, a *phased approach* was adopted to ensure the best regulations for our town.

In late 2021, the Township Committee adopted an ordinance that permitted a single license for each of cannabis cultivation and manufacturing, subject to certain conditions. The ordinance includes a local cannabis tax of 2%, which can bring significant revenues to Hopewell Township in the coming years. The adoption of these activities is consistent with our community's deep farming and agricultural roots.

More recently, in April 2022, the Township Committee adopted an ordinance that allows up to two licenses for adult-use cannabis retail in the Township. These two licenses would also be subject to the local cannabis tax.

In order for a cannabis retail business to locate itself in the Township, the business would need approval from both the State and the Township. Additionally, as a part of this ordinance, and always with safety in mind, no retail establish-

ment can be within 1,000 feet of a school or school facilities, and must go through a Planning Board review.

With cannabis now legal in New Jersey, the entire Hopewell Valley is going through a period of change. I am personally proud of Hopewell Township's approach over the past two years, which has not focused on being the first mover in any area. Rather, the focus - on safety over speed - has been to listen to residents and learn from other municipalities across the state to ensure strong, smart regulations.

I believe Hopewell Township has best in class cannabis regulations for the permitted classes, drawing not just from other communities in the state but from around the country. The regulations will benefit all residents thorough increased municipal revenue that can control future taxes.



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