

Hello Mayor Alto and council

Hope this letter finds you having an awesome day.

As I mentioned when I spoke to council last year, the Victoria Cannabis Buyers Club has moved and we are now beginning the process of rezoning. Our situation is complicated and city staff have been very helpful in assisting us to become compliant with all municipal bylaws as we continue our fight in the courts with higher levels of government.

The VCBC is proud to provide high-quality, low-cost to patients in a storefront setting that puts its member's needs first. While Canada's failing medical cannabis program continues to leave patients across the country relying on mail order, citizens of Victoria have had easy access to their medicine during the awkward transition from prohibition to legalization. With the help of the City of Victoria, the rezoning of our new location will help ensure that our non-profit society remains a part of the harm reduction services in town.

Our non-profit society is fairly small right now so our economic impact in terms of being an employer are not substantial. However, our members are generally elderly and low-income, so our prices definitely help out the most needy citizens in Victoria. Even though we are illegal, we pay GST and employee deductions, along with all other applicable taxes and operating expenses like any small business.

There has always been a strong desire to reuse, recycle and reduce waste at the VCBC, as can be witnessed by the patches on many of the pants of founder, Ted Smith. We have even started to organize an annual beach clean-up for the members.

Since the beginning, the club has tried to offer a safe place to members to relax and meet each other. We currently host monthly potluck and games nights, monthly membership meetings and have special events, like picnics, rallies and parties, throughout the year. Our club is far more than a retail space, we are a community of people caring for each other.

Thankfully this location is not far from our old home on Johnson Street so our members have been able to get to us. Many of our members live in this neighborhood, making us even more accessible to them now. Indeed, since we have moved here several people living close by have joined the club upon learning of our existence.

A considerable amount of money has been spent to put in proper ventilation so our new neighbors will not smell our facility. When we were applying for our rezoning on Johnson Street, our neighbors were not even aware that we had a lounge operating next door to them the entire time they lived there. We have built a far superior ventilation system in this new location and expect our immediate neighbors to be completely unaware of our operations unless someone informed them.

With so much crime and open drug use in the area, we are helping keep the streets in front clear of debris and unruly activity. We have cleaned up the planters in the front of the building and will be adding some paint and other additional features to further improve the visual presence of the building.

We understand that there are existing cannabis businesses in the area and that once again we will be asking for special consideration. The VCBC went through the rezoning process in its location on Johnson Street with almost identical circumstances and neighbors, so we hope that will not be a barrier to our application. Otherwise, we believe our application will conform with the city's storefront cannabis retailer policy.

In many ways, this is a wonderful opportunity for us to introduce ourselves to our new neighborhood. We have made contact with the North Park Neighborhood Association to ensure we do nothing but have a positive impact on nearby businesses, churches and homes. Our new neighbors, Daily Fresh Supermarket, have been a wonderful and welcome surprise, giving our membership an opportunity to support a small local business.

Since our locations have been downtown, security has always been a concern for our group. We have cameras in several locations and plexiglass to separate the staff from the public. There is a gate to block the distribution area, which is used both during the day and evening, and a gate at the entrance, too. All windows have bars and all entrances are guarded by a security system recently added by a small local company that monitors it in the evening.

The added feature of the lounge is actually a huge deterrent for armed robberies. Not only is a volunteer present all of the time, but the presence of members all day adds to the number of eyes and ears watching the space. Since most armed robberies occur when only one or two staff are working, the size of our organization is our biggest security measure.

Aside from that, the club's founder, Ted Smith, has experience in providing security to the club and other organizations for years. He was a student campus security officer when attending Wilfrid Laurier University as a youth and was a referee in hockey and rugby.

Currently we do not have bike parking nearby but we are now looking into how to make that happen. There is lots of parking for cars on Quadra Street and Balmoral Street.

It is not a heritage building.

Over the years, many councils have provided us assistance when we have asked, but we do not take it for granted that the current councilors will express the same depth of support that we have received in the past. We ask any councilors with questions or concerns about our activities to please visit or call us to give us an opportunity to explain any details you wish to inquire about.

One of the greatest forms of assistance the City of Victoria has provided to us has been in letters sent to the federal and provincial governments explaining the situation. At one point, Mike Farnworth replied to the city as Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General expressing partial support for the VCBC to receive an exemption, though he has been replaced by Gary Begg. If council deems it necessary, it might be prudent to write to Gary Begg to invite him to an informal meeting with the mayor and club founder, Ted Smith, so he could learn how critical the VCBC is for its patients and discuss potential paths forward towards full compliance with all applicable regulations.

Everyone at the VCBC is looking forward to this rezoning process, giving us an opportunity to explain who we are and how we operate to our new neighbors and this council.

Thank you for considering our application. If you have any questions please email hellovcbc@gmail.com or call Ted Smith at 250-415-1063.

Have a fantastic day.

Ted Smith