



April 20, 2022
Timothy Knudsen
Chairman, Zoning Board of Appeals
121 N. LaSalle St. 10th Floor
Chicago, IL 60602

Re: 212 East Ontario

Dear Commissioner Knudsen,

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the review of the proposed adult cannabis dispensary at 212 East Ontario. SOAR has participated in three events regarding the proposed project. SOAR'S Land Use & Development Task Force received a presentation from the development team via Zoom on March 9th. We also participated in a community meeting on March 22 and the SOAR Board reviewed the project. In addition, SOAR highlighted the project in our weekly Spotlight newsletter, and we have received well over 100 comments regarding the project. The SOAR Board has determined, based on input from the community, that the proposed adult recreational cannabis dispensary at 212 East Ontario is not appropriate for this location and therefore SOAR cannot support the special use permit.

The community has overwhelmingly commented to SOAR, that this location is not appropriate for this use. We are very much in favor of the property owner's desire to renovate this historic landmark, which was built in 1895 and included within a 2020 historic district. We most certainly hope that the property owner would diligently pursue a different use; one that is more compatible with the neighborhood. SOAR's reasons for not supporting this proposed project are twofold: traffic congestion and community safety.

TRAFFIC CONGESTION

The 200 block of East Ontario is currently very congested due to the very commercial nature of this block, which contains several hotels, a cultural institution, and several mixed-use structures. Adding a use, which the operator indicates will bring at least 400-600 individuals a day is beyond the breaking point. While the operator indicated that this operation is able to process a customer in less than 10 minutes, that people would walk to the facility, and there is no curb side pickup is not realistic or acceptable. There is continuous double parking in this area, particularly for drop off of the hotel and cultural institution. This may add to that at this location.

As you know, this section of East Ontario is not only the thoroughfare for exiting LSD, it is the main artery to the expressway out of the city. More importantly, it is also the main route for emergency vehicles and individuals going to Northwestern's emergency room. There are numerous times during the day and night, that traffic on this portion of Ontario is at a standstill.

At many of the other dispensaries in the surrounding areas, there are lines which extend outside the buildings. The representatives for Green & Bransford, indicated that their two security staff could patrol not only the inside, where only ten customers are allowed at any time; but that the staff also be outside to manage both the crowd waiting to get in to the dispensary. They further indicated that the two security guards could also monitor the street traffic and so that no individual could double park and run in for a purchase. We know the situation on Ontario, and we do not believe that this is at all feasible. A use such as this, with this kind of customer traffic, whether arriving on foot or in a vehicular, would certainly create the breaking point for the 200 block of East Ontario.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

We are aware that adult cannabis dispensaries operate in accordance with State and Local ordinances regarding the sale of cannabis to adults and that 212 E Ontario would potentially do so also. We appreciate that there will be two unarmed security staff on the premises when it is open, but we are concerned that there will not be any security when it is closed. While they indicated that there will be 60 cameras throughout the facility, there is no indication of any cameras outside the building nor that the security guards would be outside. The operator is planning for situations, so that their property is protected but there is no guarantee that the rest of the residential and commercial properties on the 200 block of Ontario will not see increased activity. Hours of operation have not been determined but the West Loop facility operates from 10 A.M. - 10 P.M. and the Andersonville facility operates from 9 A.M. - 9 P.M. at their Clark St location, they are able to process 120 people an hour and they have had up to 900 people a day. These late hours just add to the evening congestion on Ontario and the safety of the surrounding residents. Residents already complain of hotel guests who choose to smoke tobacco and cannabis outside the hotels that already exist on Ontario Street and some have had negative interactions with the guests. We know that the pandemic has taken a toll throughout the city but it seems that the hotels in Streeterville have suffered greatly. As they slowly return to their pre-pandemic occupancy levels, we want to be assured that this area and all of Streeterville and the city can be assured of safe streets once again.

We are also concerned that this location's proximity to the outstanding medical institutions in Streeterville, will create potential safety issues for the staff and visitors to these institutions. The Arts Club has many evening events with large gatherings with foot and vehicular traffic. As you are well aware, there have been many incidents of street crime in this area and we believe that this operation may create an attractive nuisance.

We want to remind you of the Sun-Times article 9/30/21, in which Mayor Lightfoot indicated that "We're not turning Michigan Avenue into a pot paradise." We believe that this area and other areas east of Michigan Avenue should be considered part of the protected downtown area. The totality of this vibrant mixed-use area which hosts: residents, commercial, tourists, cultural and major medical uses, does not need this additional attractive nuisance.

Finally, we are also concerned about the whole permitting process and the fact that this and all the social equity licenses are being ligated and that there is not a definitive timetable for resolution. This could tie up this project for a significant period of time and we would prefer that the owner pursue a use and user who could bring this historic building back on-line sooner and provide a positive contribution to Streeterville we support.

Again, we thank you for the opportunity to review this project.

Sincerely,



Deborah Gershbein
President SOAR

cc: Alderman Brendan Reilly
Joanna Angarone
Robert Kearney
SOAR Board of Directors