



June 6, ~~2020~~ 2022
[typo corrected]

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

Chairman Knudsen,

On behalf of River North Residents Association (RNRA), I want to share with you and the Zoning Board of Appeals members our feedback on the application for a special use to establish an Adult Use Cannabis Dispensary located in the River North neighborhood at 605 N. Clark Street.

Founded in 1997, RNRA is a 501(c)(4) non-profit, volunteer neighborhood advocacy organization. The mission of RNRA is to:

- Enhance the quality of life in River North
- Encourage strong collaboration and communications between residents, businesses, and government officials
- Promote responsible real estate development
- Advocate for infrastructure and amenity improvements
- Create a safe neighborhood and healthy environment
- Develop a collective vision that supports long term value and a single voice that represents the River North community

In accordance with the established protocol, RNRA worked with the applicant, Bio-Pharm/PTS, to review the proposed dispensary design and plan of operations, and to schedule and host a community meeting to disseminate information about the special use request and to invite local public feedback. An introductory meeting was held between PTS leadership and members of the RNRA Executive Committee on December 13, 2021, to discuss the applicant's proposal in the context of the following criteria.

- Proposed location – pedestrian and vehicular traffic, proximity to residential properties
- Physical site plan – layout, workflow, capacity
- Company leaders - experience, competence, and resources
- Adequacy of security plan and staffing – protection of people, product, and cash
- Adequacy of plan to manage customers – inside and outside of facility
- Appropriateness of advertising and messaging plan
- Good corporate citizenship - ability / willingness to mitigate negative impacts



The 605 N. Clark site is located in a prime tourist, hospitality, business, and residential center in our River North neighborhood. The plan to replace the current façade of the building with an updated design, green-scaping, and subtle, adjustable lighting is viewed as a plus. A valet option plus 50 offsite spaces should accommodate parking demand. The internal customer management plan, with 200-person staging capacity, advance order system, and segregation of medical and recreational users should reduce or eliminate pedestrian congestion. Concerns about the initial plan to transact drive-through business in the adjacent alley, and its potential impact on security, were addressed. As a result, the alley will not be used for such purposes and all guest business will be conducted inside the facility where there will be an armed security presence.

The large number of surveillance cameras, plus perimeter, silent and motion detection alarms, with battery backup, onsite generator and OEMC interface should provide adequate monitoring capability. Protocols for vault security, cash pick-up, and product delivery are satisfactory. The presence of armed and uniformed guards on duty 24/7 with exterior patrols should secure the facility and enhance public safety in the area.

The PTS management team has solid security credentials and has safely operated nearly a dozen dispensaries in several states, although not in densely populated urban environments.

The PTS plan to move its current licensed medical and recreational operations from the northwest side was denied by the State of Illinois. PTS subsequently partnered with Bio-Pharm, a social equity applicant, to manage the operations aspects of the now proposed recreational-only business. A subsequent meeting was held on April 11, 2022, to introduce the applicant's new partner, Bio-Pharm, to the RNRA team.

The community meeting was conducted on May 10, 2022, at Maggiano's Banquet facility with both in-person and Zoom attendance options. Invitations were featured in e-newsletters from both the RNRA and the 42nd Ward office, which were distributed to more than 6,000 individuals. On the night of the meeting, approximately 45 people attended in person, with up to 37 participating virtually. Brian Israel, RNRA President, welcomed guests, briefly explained the dispensary licensing process, and moderated the Q&A session that followed the applicant presentation. The Bio-Pharm/PTS leadership team was represented by Terry Peterson who articulated the plan for the proposed makeover of the Rainforest Café facility.

Attendees of both the in-person and Zoom meeting options raised concerns about social equity and questioned the need for another recreational cannabis facility in River North. Participants talked about the need for more enforcement of laws prohibiting cannabis usage, on the streets and on public transit, and expressed concerns about the potential for increased illegal activities in the area around the site. Representatives of an organization called Ex-Cons for Community and Social Change (ECCSC) emphatically expressed their views on the dispensary licensing process, which they feel has insufficiently



included minorities, specifically African-Americans, and they challenged the worthiness of Bio-Pharm as a legitimate social equity partner.

The Bio-Pharm/PTS Zoom presentation experienced technical audio and visual problems during the meeting, which upset and disappointed approximately 30 online attendees who felt that their voices and opposition were not being adequately represented. RNRA provided attendees with a dedicated email address to use in the event that questions remained at the end of the meeting. Only one individual used the email address to request additional information from the applicant and their attorney. Members of the Executive Board subsequently shared community meeting experiences and final observations for the purpose of drafting this letter.

RNRA Executive Board members are committed volunteers and River North residents who take their stewardship and neighborhood advocacy role seriously. As outlined in the introduction to each public meeting, RNRA's focus is not to determine whether cannabis should be legal, or whether dispensaries should be allowed to operate in River North. Rather, it is to determine whether the establishment and operation of a particular proposed dispensary is likely to adversely impact the community that we serve. Our organization's experience in this area has led to the creation of a set of Best Practices for cannabis dispensary owners and operators. This document (copy attached herewith) is routinely shared with applicants and posted on our website.

At the end of this process, our consensus is that the establishment and operation of the PTS/Bio-Pharm dispensary at 605 N Clark Street is unlikely to have a deleterious impact on the surrounding community.

Please feel free to reach out to me at bisrael@rnrachicago.org if you have any additional questions. We value your support and thank the Zoning Board of Appeals for allowing us to participate in this important assessment process.

Sincerely submitted on behalf of River North Residents Association Board,

Brian Israel

Brian Israel
President

cc:
Alderman Brendan Reilly, 42nd Ward
Mara Georges, Georges & Synowiecki, Ltd.
Adam Gypalo, Resolute Public Affairs