



June 29, 2022

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 612 N. Wells 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, GRI Holdings LLC, 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 GRI leadership and members of the RNRA Executive Committee on January 31, 2022, 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 612 N. Wells site is located in a prime tourist, hospitality, business, and residential center in our River North neighborhood between two main traffic arterials: Ontario and Ohio streets. The plan includes replacement of the



current façade of the building with an updated design, new graphics on the north wall, new parking lot fencing, landscaping, and subtle signage and lighting. The internal customer management plan provides a waiting area for up to 56 customers who arrive through a shared entrance and exit, an advance order system with confirming texts to customers when orders are ready, self-service kiosks and ATM's. Payment cards will be accepted for non-cash purchases at 7 point-of-sale positions. There will be no public alley usage as all deliveries, product loading, cash management services will be conducted through a managed internal receiving area accessible from the adjacent parking lot. Business hours would be 9 am to 10 pm seven days a week. GRI Holdings LLC is certified as a 51% Veteran-Owned business.

Several areas of concern were identified in the initial presentation. Foremost was the insufficiently defined and inadequate security plan, which included only one onsite security guard, no overnight internal security presence and a roving patrol car not uniquely assigned to the facility. The proximity of the site to a primary highway entrance, which has been used as an escape route for criminal activity, underscores the importance of additional precautionary measures. Tom Wheeler, Chief Security Officer, and long-standing police professional was urged to rethink the design and implementation of the security plan. Another concern was the lack of a specific traffic study addressing vehicle volumes and bike lanes, and the reliability of assumptions based on activity in markets outside of Chicago. There was some vagueness about the applicant's intentions regarding the property, with lease-to-buy and outright purchase options still to be determined. Finally, the 612 N. Wells facility is very close to the existing MOCA dispensary at 216 W. Ohio, which raises broader concerns about cannabis business saturation in the immediate neighborhood.

GRI leaders were asked to reassess and finalize their plans to address RNRA concerns. A follow-up meeting would be needed to review feedback.

At the follow-up meeting on May 2, 2022, the GRI team addressed RNRA concerns. A new, more robust security plan with increased onsite armed guards was affirmed. 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 surveillance cameras, plus perimeter, silent and motion detection alarms with battery backup, onsite generator, license plate readers and OEMC interface should provide adequate monitoring capability. Protocols for vault security, cash pick-up, and product delivery are satisfactory. The parking lot will be locked during non-business hours, and a more secure pickup and delivery enclosure will be constructed at the northwest corner of the building. GRI also confirmed that they would be purchasing the facility and will designate a community liaison to interface with neighboring residents and businesses.

The community meeting was conducted on May 23, 2022, at the Westin River North facility with both in-person and Zoom attendance options. Invitations, featured in e-newsletters from both the RNRA and the 42nd Ward office, were distributed to several thousand recipients. On the night of the meeting, there were less than 5 in-person attendees, and a similar number 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 GRI Holdings LLC leadership team was represented by: Gabriel Martinez, Chief Executive Officer; Veronica (Aceves) Hunt, Operations Director; Thomas Wheeler, Jr, Chief Security Officer; Jay E. Stewart, Compliance Director; Dana



Oswald, Chief Operations Officer; Vincent Serpico, Chief Labor and Environmental Officer; Robert Gloppe, Chief Education and Training Officer; and Ross Morreale, Chief Executive Officer - Green Rose Advisors. Additional presenters included Paul Ohm, Executive Vice President and Principal, and Stefano Vitale, Executive Vice President and Principal at P4 Security Solutions, and Nick Ftikas, their attorney, who articulated the plan for the proposed makeover of the 612 N. Wells facility.

There were no questions raised by either physical or virtual participants at the end of the presentation. Members of the RNRA Executive Board subsequently shared 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 GRI Holdings LLC dispensary at 612 N. Wells is unlikely to have a deleterious impact on the surrounding community.

Please feel free to reach out to me at bisrael@rnrrachicago.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,

Brian Israel

Brian Israel
President

cc:

Alderman Brendan Reilly, 42nd Ward
Joanna Angarone, 42nd Ward
Nick Ftikas, Law Offices of Sam Banks
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