

Arlington Police Department


Frederick Ryan
Chief of Police



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Town of Arlington
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Date: November 16, 2015
To: Adam Chapdelaine
Town Manager
From: Frederick Ryan
Chief of Police
Re: Medical Marijuana Dispensary



As town officials contemplate the policy issues surrounding the potential presence of a medical marijuana dispensary in the community, I would like to seek this opportunity to weigh in on matters relating to public safety and quality of life issues likely to present themselves should such a dispensary be authorized.

Pre-Existing Resource Challenges

More than a decade ago the Arlington Board of Selectman commissioned a management study of the police department. The resulting report and recommendations documented the fact that the police department was severely understaffed when compared to the service demand of the community and as compared to other similarly situated communities in the Commonwealth. While all of the consultant's recommendations relative to internal management controls/practices were implemented by police department staff, the town chose not to fund the recommendations of the consultant relative to police staffing levels.

Since that time, the demand on police services has increased exponentially. For example, the community has authorized dozens of new liquor licenses (now a total of 53) as well as liquor stores, passed several new bylaws (noise abatement, door to door solicitation, traffic control, etc.), annual calls for service continue to climb, the complexity of criminal investigations/cyber crime increases daily, and the demand for traffic control/safety following a series of traffic fatalities, is at an all time high.

More recently, the police department, along with our public health counterparts, have been faced with an opiate epidemic in the community that has resulted in twice the number of overdoses (fatal & non-fatal) in CY2015 as compared to CY2014. The police resources committed to drug control, education, and prevention in response to the presence of illegal narcotics and associated crime in the community has caused a significant strain on police resources.

Despite these and many other challenges, the police department remains at the same staffing level as when the management study was originally commissioned.

Proactive and Proud

Police Service Demand

There is no question that the presence of a marijuana dispensary in the community will add demand to the community's police capacity, a capacity that is already stretched to the limit. Other communities with dispensaries have experienced a situation where the presence of a dispensary has drawn a large volume of persons from outside of the community for the sole purpose of purchasing marijuana.

We would expect, at a minimum, to experience an increase in traffic/parking violations, burglary, loitering, disturbances, public consumption of alcohol/marijuana, and other calls for service.

Conclusion/Recommendation

Building trust and legitimacy between the citizenry and business people in the community is among our highest priorities as a police department. Managing calls for service to the neighborhood of a Medical Marijuana dispensary on a reactive basis would likely erode such trust. On the other hand, having regularly assigned foot patrol officers to the major retail areas in Arlington during daytime and evening hours would result in relationship building among business people and residents that would result in more proactive problem solving to prevent any adverse impacts that may be caused by the dispensary.

In order to deploy such foot patrols we would need to add four (4) Patrol Officers to the department at an annual operating cost of about \$400,000; further, I would recommend that we consider fully funding the Arlington Youth Health and Safety Coalition staff and related prevention activities so as to enhance our substance abuse prevention posture in the community.

Any public endorsement by me would hinge upon a mitigation plan that included such funding.

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