

EDITORIAL >>

A Dose of Reality for Cannabis

Earlier this month, Trulieve Cannabis Corp. announced it will be exiting the Massachusetts market by the end of the year, a move that includes the closure of its massive growing and processing facility in Holyoke.

The company, which is also scaling back in California and exiting the Nevada wholesale market, cited changing conditions and slumping business for the moves, which are the latest to signal that the cannabis sector in the Bay State is losing some of its luster amid growing competition from other states.

Indeed, some dispensaries have closed within the 413, and other companies have announced layoffs. Meanwhile, several proposed cannabis facilities, including one planned for the former Chez Josef banquet house in Agawam, have been scrapped due to an inability to secure financing amid dramatically changing market conditions.

Cannabis got off to a fast and quite solid start in this region, with facilities opening in most area cities and towns, absorbing vacant or underutilized real estate — ranging from former mill buildings to the Springfield Newspapers headquarters facility in downtown Springfield — in the process.

This has been especially true in Holyoke, a city that has

aggressively courted the industry, with many former mills, some of which had been vacant for years, being retrofitted for growing operations and dispensaries. Trulieve's Holyoke facility, formerly home to Conklin Office Furniture, will soon be on the market, and given the current downward trends in the sector, there are certainly question marks about whether another large-scale operation will be taking over that space.

It's been a time of change and turbulence for the region's cannabis sector as prices continue to fall and competition in Massachusetts and surrounding states continues to mount. This business was never as easy as it looked, given the hurdles that need to be cleared to simply open the doors and the high taxes that operations must pay. But now, it's much more difficult to be profitable.

It is our hope that those that can survive this whitewater can stay in the game for the long term, because cannabis has become an important part of the region's economy, one that has provided a real boost to communities like Holyoke, Easthampton, Northampton, and others.

The 'green rush' is losing some of its steam, but it is still a potent force within this market. **■**

OPINION >>

Stormwater Solutions for Parking Lots

BY JOSEPH KIETNER AND RANDAL BROWN

Through stormwater-management improvements to large parking areas, business owners can improve drainage, enhance the appeal and look of properties, and help to reduce contaminated storm flows to local rivers, streams, and lakes in the Pioneer Valley.

We, along with our colleagues in the Connecticut River Stormwater Committee, a regional coalition of 19 municipalities and UMass Amherst that is staffed by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, recommend that business and commercial property owners with large parking areas consider making improvements and retrofits to improve how storm flows are collected and treated.

There are two primary options for consideration when thinking about parking-lot stormwater improvements:

1. Retrofit or replace existing catch basins with deep sump hooded catch basins. In most parking lots, a curb and gutter system directs rainfall into catch basins, which are essentially boxes below ground that connect to the storm sewer system. Deep sump hooded catch basins are designed to capture sand and other sediment, litter, and floatables, including oil and grease. The four- to six-foot-deep sump provides an area for sediments to settle.

By capturing sediment and other pollutants, deep sump hooded catch basins can improve stormwater quality compared to older catch basins that do not have sumps or hoods. A study conducted in New York City demonstrated that deep sump hooded catch basins increased the capture of floatables (trash and oil and grease) by 70% to 80% over regular catch basins without hoods, and greatly extended the cleaning interval without a decrease in performance.

2. Retrofit the parking lot with vegetated areas where soil and plants can soak up rainfall. Vegetated areas in parking lots can be designed to receive and soak up flows. Any overflow from these areas can then be directed to existing parking-lot catch basins. Not only do such retrofits improve water quality, but trees and other plants along with soils can help reduce the superheating effects of large paved areas during summer months. Such facilities also make properties more visually attractive.

If your property is located in a municipality with a stormwater enterprise fund or stormwater utility fee, improvements may also be eligible for stormwater fee credits. Check with your local public works department.

To make stormwater improvements easier, the Connecticut River Stormwater Committee, along with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and Waterstone Engineering, have developed a library of green infrastructure stormwater-control design templates that can be sized to specific drainage areas. This library of design templates serves as an important tool. In addition to maintenance guidance, it includes key information on sizing, estimated cost, and pollutant loading reduction for each type of facility. See www.thinkblueconnecticutriver.org for more information. **■**

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“I think this project will bring benefits in that it will rehabilitate a blighted property that has not been operational for quite some time.”

East Longmeadow

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Developing Stories

As noted earlier, the property at 330 Chestnut, across the street from the Lenox manufacturing facility, has been a declining eyesore, and a source of seemingly endless speculation, for many years.

It appeared that an answer had been found several years ago, when a development group, East Longmeadow Redevelopers LLC, put plans on the table for a mixed-use facility, or ‘village,’ as it was called by some, one that would include housing and commercial uses. Those plans were conceived just before the start of the pandemic, said McNally, adding that the project essentially died on the vine amid COVID-related issues such as spiraling costs and supply-chain woes, as well as disagreement between the developer and the Town Council over how much of the space would be devoted to commercial uses.

In its place, East Longmeadow Developers LLC proposed the large warehouse facility — more than 500,000 square feet in size, with 100 docking bays — which has drawn considerable opposition from residents, especially those in an over-55 luxury condo development called the Fields at Chestnut, citing increased truck traffic and noise.

The project is allowed, from a zoning perspective, and the Planning Board approved the proposal, with approximately 20 conditions, earlier this spring, Torcia said. One of those conditions, mandating a right turn out of the property, away from the Fields of Chestnut, was not discussed at earlier hearings, he noted, adding that it would certainly be the focus of discussion at the public hearing slated for June 20.

The developers have estimated there will be roughly 400 vehicle trips per day at the site, he said, adding that he believes that most of these trucks will take a second right — rather than a left and head for the center of town — and proceed to highways through roads in



Bill Laplante says building lots are increasingly difficult to come by, and when they do become available, they go fast, and for high prices.

Staff Photo

Enfield and Longmeadow.

“I think this project will bring benefits in that it will rehabilitate a blighted property that has not been operational for quite some time,” he explained. “But we did hear from people who spoke at the meetings who were rightfully concerned about an increase in traffic, going from a property where there’s been no activity to one with considerable activity.”

There has been no activity, or very little of it, at the Carlin Combustion site for the better part of a decade, said McNally, but that

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