

Mono Council opts out of hosting cannabis stores in community

By Jasen Obermeyer

Faced with making a decision on cannabis retail stores, Mono council has unanimously decided to opt out of allowing them in the town.

At the first meeting of the calendar year, held Tuesday, council discussed the pros and cons of having cannabis stores in town. Council needed to make a decision before a Jan. 22 deadline set by the Province.

"I resent the fact that the province has put a gun to our heads and said you must make this decision to opt in by a certain date. I think that it utterly irresponsible," said Mono Deputy Mayor John Creelman. "There's always strings attached."

Cannabis was officially legalized on Oct. 17. The Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (ACGO) was established as the retail licensing body, including the establishment of the Ontario Cannabis Store (OCS) for online sales; and, aligns cannabis consumption rules with tobacco places of use under the Smoke Free Ontario Act. There is no cap on the number of retail stores permitted.

A report sent Council by Town staff indicated that the municipality's Official Plan, Zoning Bylaws or licensing bylaws will not apply to cannabis retail stores, but if a store site is proposed in a community, the AGCO will provide a 15-day notification or commenting period to receive public input and hear concerns from the local community.

"If we opted in, and someone applied for a shop in Mono, (the bylaws) just pass right over us," commented Councillor Fred Nix.

"There's aspect with respect to distancing from other existing uses that could be considered vulnerable, schools and so forth," said David Trotman, the town's director of planning.

It was also indicated that the province would provide \$40 million over two years to help municipalities with the costs of the legalization, making the first payment to all municipalities on a per-household basis, with at least \$5,000 provided to each municipality. The province would then distribute a second payment following the proposed deadline. "It's got to be in bylaw enforcement or education," noted Fred Simpson, the town's deputy clerk.

"If we opt out, we have the potential of opting in later on," added Councillor Ralph Manktelow, noting that if they chose to opt in, they can't reverse it in the future. "We seem to lose all control here, complete control. At the moment, there's no advantage to opt in."

After Councillor Nix put forth the motion to opt out, and Deputy Mayor Creelman seconded it, a recorded vote was taken.

Orangeville Council has already voted to allow the stores, while the Town of Erin has decided to opt out.