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Columbia moves to become 1st county municipality to zone for medical marijuana



TIM STUHLREHER | Staff Writer 8 hrs ago



AP File Photo

Columbia Borough is looking to amend its zoning to allow medical marijuana

dispensaries and growers or processors in areas zoned “light industrial.”

Officials believe that would make it the first municipality in Lancaster County to zone for such businesses since Pennsylvania legalized medical marijuana last year.

Mayor Leo Lutz said no one has approached the borough with a specific business plan involving medical marijuana — which is hardly surprising, given that only 27 dispensary permits and 12 grower-processor permits were issued statewide.

But if an applicant does turn up, amending the ordinance now ensures the business will go in an appropriate area, Lutz said — as opposed to the central business district, for example.

“We try to be proactive,” he said.

Municipalities are required to allow every legal property use somewhere within their boundaries, he noted.

COLUMBIA ZONING CHANGE WOULD TARGET MEDICAL MARIJUANA

A proposal to amend its zoning ordinance would allow marijuana dispensaries and grower/processors in areas zoned “light industrial.”



SOURCE: COLUMBIA BOROUGH

Lancaster County Planning Commission signed off on the ordinance at its meeting Monday. That sets it up to go before the borough planning commission in October and, if all goes well, to borough council in November, Lutz said.

A couple of other municipalities have started to study the issue, said Laura Proctor, of the county planners' community planning department. However, Columbia is the only one so far to submit a zoning amendment for county review.

It would allow medical marijuana businesses in the light-industrial zone “by right” — that is, they would not have to go through a special hearing for approval, as long as they complied with all of the borough’s applicable ordinances and state law.

Proctor recommended some adjustments to the wording to clarify that only medical marijuana is at issue, not marijuana in general. She also suggested Columbia “borrow” some of the state law’s language on the type of facility and locations allowed.

But if it does so, and state law is changed, the borough might have to revisit the ordinance, noted commission member Kathy Wasong.

If it is passed, the ordinance could serve as a model for other municipalities, Lutz said.

State officials [expect Pennsylvania’s medical marijuana program to get underway sometime in 2018](#), although it is facing various legal challenges.

One company that received a permit, Bay LLC, [plans to open a site at the former Kmart](#) at 1890 Fruitville Pike in Manheim Township. Bay plans to do business under the name Cure Pennsylvania.

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