



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

YOU GO, GIRLS

Grade 4 girls hit the trails of Bruce's Mill Conservation Area during the York Region public school board's elementary cross-country championships last Thursday.

Legal grow-ops getting super-sized by federal government

Town wants say on marijuana farms

BY SANDRA BOLAN
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A large-scale grow op is expected to set up shop on rural land somewhere on Whitchurch-Stouffville's Ninth Line.

And it will be 100-per-cent legal.

The federal government recently changed its medicinal marijuana production regulations, which means small-scale, home-based operations will be shut down by the end of March. They will be replaced with large-scale, farm-like pot-producing facilities.

The purpose is to treat medicinal marijuana like other controlled narcotics.

Under the new regulations, potential operators must notify municipal staff as well as the local fire and police departments of their application to Health Canada. So far, Whitchurch-Stouffville has received one application from a Ninth Line property owner.

Operators must also comply

with all federal, provincial and municipal laws and bylaws, including municipal zoning bylaws.

"York Regional Police has been made aware of the changes that Health Canada will be making to the licensing of medicinal marijuana grow operations. The changes provide a more structured set of guidelines for these operations, including notifying police of where the manufacturing sites will be located. The laws with respect to the production and sale of drugs reside in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, which we will continue to enforce," Const. Andy Pattenden told The Sun-Tribune via e-mail.

Under the program currently being phased out, there are 4,200 growers licensed to produce for a maximum of two patients each. Those growing facilities can be located anywhere, including in homes around parks and schools.

"There are proper places they can put these things, not in resi-

dential areas," Mayor Wayne Emmerson told The Sun-Tribune.

It is impossible to know if there are any legal, small-scale operations within Whitchurch-Stouffville, because, according to media spokespeople for Health Canada, in order to search their database a postal code but preferably an exact address, is required, for them to check.

NINTH LINE LOCATION

While the new regulations call for the licence applicant to notify the municipality of their intentions, there are no mechanisms in place for municipalities to say no or even have public input, according to Alan Drozd, manger of planning for Whitchurch-Stouffville.

And that is what concerns the mayor.

"All that we want is a say where these things go and public participation," Mr. Emmerson told The Sun-Tribune.

Municipalities, however, do have a say, according to Paul Calan-

dra, MP for Oak Ridges-Markham.

"If the town wants to put in a mechanism where they will consult with the community, then go ahead," he told The Sun-Tribune.

"Some municipalities may say not in our town, there is no area suitable in our community and that is OK," he said.

Mr. Drozd is also concerned about the lack of reporting mechanisms for growers to prove to Health Canada they have followed the rules.

For instance, while the municipality cannot veto the location of a cell tower, prior to erecting it, the telecommunications company must follow a certain protocol in Whitchurch-Stouffville, which includes a public hearing. The cell operator then has to report back to the federal government that all conditions of the application process have been completed.

In Whitchurch-Stouffville, a medicinal marijuana production facility could fit into the zoning

bylaw's definition of agricultural use.

Whitchurch-Stouffville's next step is a staff report regarding whether or not these facilities require specific consideration in the zoning bylaw and/or through other regulations.

BY THE NUMBERS

There are currently 37,400 recognized medical marijuana users by Health Canada. That number is expected to grow to 450,000 by 2024.

In order to be prescribed medicinal marijuana, the medical doctor and patient must declare conventional treatments for severe pain and/or persistent muscle spasms due to multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury or disease, cancer, HIV/AIDS, severe forms of arthritis, epileptic seizures or treatment in the context of compassionate end-of-life care, have been tried or considered and found to be ineffective or medically inappropriate for the treatment of the ailment, according to Health Canada's website.

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