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## PRACTICE **MARIJUANA LAND USE**



# Regulating Medical and Recreational Marijuana Land Use

By Lynne A. Williams

Twenty-five states and the District of Columbia allow the cultivation, sale, and use of medical marijuana.

In addition, four states—Colorado, Washington, Oregon, and Alaska—have legalized the cultivation, possession, use, and sale of recreational marijuana, and the District of Columbia has legalized cultivation, possession, and use. In 2016, there will likely be at least five, if not more, states that will vote on the legalization of recreational marijuana, including Arizona, California, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Maine. (For information about individual states and the status of marijuana laws, see [norml.org/states](http://norml.org/states).)

While the legalization of medical marijuana created some land-use issues, for the most part they are simpler and less urgent compared with issues related to the legalization of recreational uses. California failed to even enact a regulatory scheme until late 2015, 19 years after legalizing medical marijuana. During that time, so-called dispensaries proliferated but towns and cities were slow to address potential land-use issues, given the lack of guidance by the state. Maine, which legalized medical marijuana in 1999, did not even allow dispensaries until 2009. So for 10 years Maine's patients got their medicine from a system of individual caregivers, most of whom operated out of their homes or farms and were limited to serving five or fewer patients. However, the legalization of recreational marijuana in a number of states, with more to follow—combined with the possibility of new dispensaries in some states—has spurred towns and cities to begin to discuss land-use issues for marijuana businesses.

Currently, towns, cities, and counties use a wide variety of regulatory tactics to control marijuana businesses and activities, and those tactics break down into two broad groups—business licensing standards and zoning. With respect to medical marijuana uses, most of the focus has been on regulating the siting of dispensaries and cultivation operations through zoning. The types of regulatory schemes es-

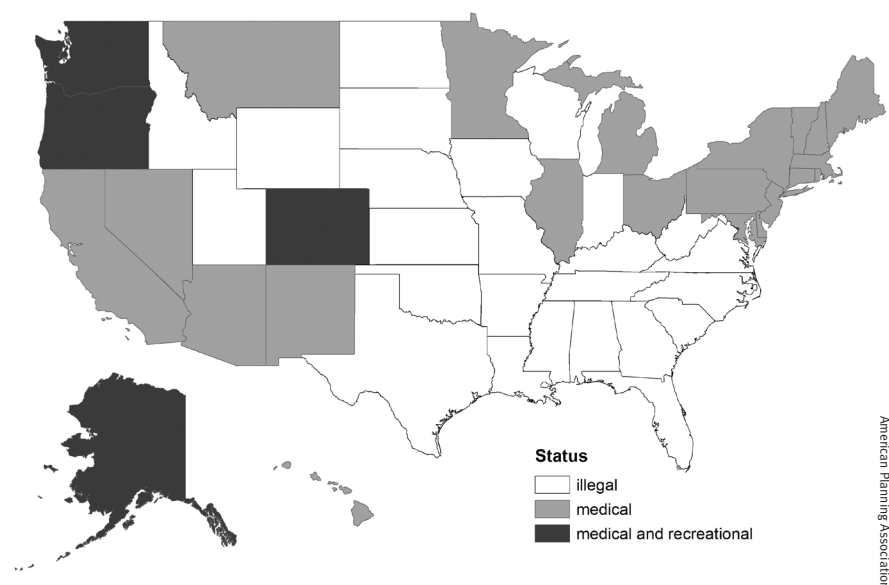
tablished in the newly legalized recreational marijuana states range from localities “opting out” to making a marijuana business a “use by right” in certain districts, with a required permit. Most tactics use both zoning and business licensing regulations, often in combination. For example, a business licensing requirement can be overlaid on a zoning ordinance, so that if a marijuana business use is an allowed use, the business must still obtain a license, and that process would address specific aspects of the business, such as safety issues, noise, odors, parking, traffic, and other impacts.

This article reviews local approaches to regulating medicinal and recreational marijuana. While both medical and recreational marijuana businesses are part of a new economic sector that involves land uses and businesses,

heretofore unseen in many communities, there are multiple options that can be implemented. The following sections discuss how these options are being implemented both in jurisdictions that have legalized recreational marijuana as well as in those that have only legalized medical marijuana.

## FEDERAL PREEMPTION

Marijuana, whether medical or recreational, continues to be listed on Schedule I of the U.S. Controlled Substances Act (CSA) and is therefore still illegal under federal law. However, the U. S. Department of Justice (DOJ), most recently in 2013, has advised federal prosecutors to refrain from using scarce federal drug enforcement resources to prosecute individuals who are in compliance with state law (Cole 2013).



As of July 2016, 25 states and the District of Columbia have legalized medical marijuana. Four of those states have also legalized recreational marijuana sale and usage.

This advisory from the DOJ reduced the potential conflict between the federal government and those states that have legalized recreational or medical marijuana. And reducing conflict between the states and the federal government will consequently constrain the ability of a local jurisdiction to successfully ban marijuana businesses based on an argument that such businesses are in violation of the CSA.

Division One of the Arizona Court of Appeals is currently considering a case in which Maricopa County attempted to prevent White Mountain Health Center, a dispensary, from opening (*White Mountain Health Center, Inc. v. Maricopa County et al.*, 1 CA-CV 12-0831). The county argued that denying a dispensary a permit to open is legally permissible since such a business violates the CSA. However, while states can regulate marijuana, they are not required to enforce federal law. In this case, Arizona has legalized medical marijuana and regulates dispensaries, and White Mountain argues that the county's denial of a permit was impermissible in that it conflicted with state law. The *White Mountain* decision will likely be issued soon.

In February 2014, the Michigan Supreme Court declared a city zoning ordinance in Wyoming, Michigan, void because it prohibited uses that were permitted under state law (*Ter Beek v. City of Wyoming*, 846 N.W.2d 531, 495 Mich. 1 (2014)). The plaintiff was a qualifying patient who wished to grow and use marijuana for medical purposes in his home. The town of Wyoming had passed an ordinance prohibiting the activity. The court held that a municipality is precluded from enacting an ordinance if the ordinance directly conflicts with the state's statutory scheme of regulation, in that the ordinance permits what the statute prohibits, or prohibits what the statute permits. In this case, the Michigan Medical Marijuana Act permitted qualified patients to grow their own medicine; therefore, the city could not prohibit such a practice.

### MEDICAL MARIJUANA REGULATORY MODELS

The first medical marijuana statute was passed 20 years ago, but in many ways it is only within the last few years that those early statutes have been refined on the local jurisdictional level. Some jurisdictions were required by newly passed state regulations to create local ordinances, such as Humboldt County, California, and the municipalities within the county, while other local jurisdictions, including Detroit, took

the initiative following a period of confusion over the definition and regulation of dispensaries.

### Humboldt County, California

Earlier this year, California's Humboldt County passed one of the most comprehensive land-use ordinances to date regulating medical marijuana production. The Commercial Medical Marijuana Land Use Ordinance (CMMLUO) passed the Board of Commissioners unanimously, a testament to the many disparate groups coming together to draft the ordinance (Ordinance No. 2544). Much of Humboldt County is unincorporated land, and although there are municipalities in the county, much of the cultivation is done on unincorporated land.

The CMMLUO includes two parts: one regulating the coastal zone and the other regulating inland cultivation. Both zones are regulated according to a list of factors, including whether the applicant is a new or existing grower, the parcel size, the cultivation area size, and whether the proposed grow operation will be outdoors, indoors, or mixed-light, meaning that both natural light and artificial light will be used.

The goal of the CMMLUO is very clear: "to limit and control such cultivation in coordination with the State of California." Although the Compassionate Care Act was passed in 1996—the first medical marijuana law in the country—the state failed to enact medical marijuana regulations until late 2015. Humboldt County was proactive in enacting a countywide ordinance to immediately comply with state law. The ordinance specifically defines exactly what it is regulating. "This section applies to all facilities and activities involved in the Commercial Cultivation, Processing, Manufacture or Distribution of cannabis for medical use, in the County of Humboldt" (CMMLUO §55.4.9). The type of approval necessary for licensing is dependent on the size and current zoning classification of the parcel, as well as the type of state license that the applicant is required to obtain.

The Humboldt municipalities of Arcata and Eureka have also passed ordinances related to cultivation. Arcata essentially permits only small-scale and home cultivation, although those with special needs may request more grow space (Land Use Code §9.42.105). It also enacted a 45 percent tax increase on residences that use more than 600 percent of

### Medical Marijuana Terminology

It is far easier to define recreational marijuana uses by the vocabulary of traditional businesses, such as agricultural, retail, food processing, and the like, than it is to define medical marijuana uses. There is no national consensus on terminology in the medical marijuana arena. In fact, the word "dispensary" has multiple meanings depending on location. In most, but not all, of the medical marijuana states, the term "dispensary" means the entity that distributes medicinal marijuana to qualified patients. This may be a large facility that also cultivates the marijuana (e.g., Maine and Michigan) or a small shop that purchases from independent growers (e.g., California and Arizona). The entity can be a collective, nonprofit, for-profit business, or any other form of entity legal under state law.

In certain states the caregiver system, another form of cultivation and distribution, exists side by side with the dispensary system. Caregivers are state-licensed individuals who grow, process, and distribute medicinal marijuana to a limited number of qualified patients. Caregivers are regulated under state law, but have only recently been subject to land-use regulation. (For a chart detailing the distribution laws under each state that has legalized medicinal marijuana, see [tinyurl.com/y2tyn7g](http://tinyurl.com/y2tyn7g).)

the energy baseline, with the aim of discouraging indoor growing (Municipal Code §2628.5). Eureka passed a much more restrictive and detailed ordinance, only allowing licensed patients to grow and process medical cannabis within a 50-square-foot area in their residence (§158.010(A)). The ordinance also states that such cultivation will constitute neither a home occupation nor an ancillary use (§158.010(C)). Patient marijuana processing is likewise narrowly regulated (§158.011).

### Detroit

Detroit recently passed a medical marijuana ordinance requiring dispensaries, now called

Caregiver Centers, to apply to the city for a license (Ordinance 30-15). A subsequent zoning amendment added Caregiver Centers as permissible uses in specific zones and explicitly prohibits them in the Traditional Main Street Overlay and the Gateway Radial Thoroughfare Districts (Ordinance 31-15). Detroit seeks to distribute the Caregiver Centers rather than cluster them in a few areas, since they cannot be less than 1,000 feet from each other nor closer than 1,000 feet from a park, religious institution, or business identified as a controlled use, such as topless clubs and liquor stores. If a business is within 1,000 feet of any of these land uses, the board of zoning appeals allows for a variance process that could still allow the facility to establish or continue to operate. The city's Buildings, Safety, Engineering, and Environmental Department can also approve variances.

If, however, the parcel in question is less than 1,000 feet from the city-defined Drug Free Zones, that option is not available. No variance is allowed for parcels falling into these buffer zones, and there are many such buffers zones. The federal Drug Free School Zone applies just to libraries and K–12 schools. However, the Detroit version includes arcades, child care centers, youth activity centers, public housing, outdoor recreation areas, and all educational institutions, including all of their properties. In the industrial districts, the centers can be less than 1,000 feet from each other to allow for some clustering, and the buffer zone from residential areas is waived.

An individual who cultivates marijuana in a residence in Detroit is required to register as a home-based occupation. The city's licensing standards state: "Except for home occupations . . . no person shall dispense, cultivate or provide medical marijuana under the Act except at a medical marihuana caregiver center" (§24-13-4). That registration process involves inspection and approval by numerous city agencies.

### Maine

Maine passed its medical marijuana law in 1999, but it was not until 2009 that dispensaries were allowed there. Up until that time, patients received their medicine from a caregiver, individuals licensed to grow and distribute medicinal marijuana to no more than five patients. That system remains operational, with over 2,000 caregivers, and is greatly favored by many patients in the state. There has been little impact of land-use regulation on caregivers, for a number of reasons. The fact that an

individual is a caregiver is kept confidential by the state, so a town doesn't really know who the caregivers are. Until a year or two ago, caregivers mainly grew their plants and serviced their patients out of their homes, and many towns essentially allow home occupations with few, if any, restrictions.

In the last two years, however, there has been an increase in the number of caregivers leasing commercial space, primarily in light industrial zones. Thus the towns where this is occurring will need to decide whether they wish to develop special regulations for buildings housing multiple caregivers in industrial zones. There is no state law prohibiting this practice, even though under state law each caregiver must have his or her own locked space within the building, and that space must be inaccessible to anyone else except their one employee. Some towns maintain that any growing of plants by a caregiver, whether indoors or outdoors, is an agricultural use, thereby preventing multiple caregivers from leasing grow spaces in an industrial space. Conversely, those towns that classify caregiving as a light industrial use will have to contend with outdoor cultivation and grow operations in homes and on farms in residential districts.

Maine towns that have chosen to refine their land-use ordinances to address medical marijuana caregiving share some common goals: updating existing site plan review requirements, if needed; defining the caregiver land-use category; considering a "safe zone" as an overlay zone, thereby requiring greater setback distances than other uses in the zone; instituting fencing and setback requirements on outdoor cultivation; and considering standards for multiple caregiver facilities.

In 2009, the Maine Medical Use of Marijuana Act was amended to allow eight dispensaries in the state, one in each of eight regions. Even though the cap on dispensaries has been reached, some towns with land-use ordinances are struggling to find ways to regulate dispensary locations if the cap is lifted. State law is clear that a town cannot ban dispensaries but can limit the number to one. In general, what a number of towns are attempting to do is bring dispensary siting under site plan review and define what zone or zones are appropriate for a dispensary. Often the dispensaries are relegated to one, or a few, locations, a form of cluster zoning rather than keeping dispensaries and other marijuana businesses a distance away from each other. A few towns are looking at an



A former fast food restaurant in California was converted into a medical marijuana dispensary.

overlay district, which would impose additional controls and an additional form of review, over dispensary siting.

### RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA REGULATORY MODELS

Towns, cities, and counties within states that have legalized recreational marijuana have taken very different regulatory tacks. For example, the state of Washington has practically subsumed the Washington medical marijuana program into the recreational legalization scheme, in a bill passed in April 2015 that will be implemented in 2016. And Oregon, while keeping the medical program separate from the regulation of recreational marijuana businesses, has imposed strict new rules on the medical growers and patients.

A key issue for states that have legalized recreational marijuana is where marijuana may be smoked or vaped. None of the legalization statutes permit smoking marijuana in public, so, particularly in communities with a large number of tourists, the issue of consumption location is a critical one. Although a tourist can purchase marijuana, smoking might not be allowed in a hotel or motel room. To address this issue, some jurisdictions are looking at permitting so-called “social clubs,” similar to cigar bars, where visitors could smoke or consume marijuana. None of the four states that have legalized recreational marijuana included social clubs in their statutes. However, a pending rule change in Alaska would allow existing marijuana retail stores to purchase a separate license for a “consumption area.” And in November, Denver voters will consider a measure that would allow the consumption of marijuana—but not sales—at private social clubs and during private events if the organizers obtain a permit.

Below is a discussion of local prohibition in Pueblo, Colorado, and use by right in Pueblo County; traditional zoning and business permitting in Seattle; a focus on farmland preservation and opt-in/opt-out in Oregon; and a focus on business licensing, as opposed to zoning-based controls, in Denver.

#### Pueblo County, Colorado

In 2012, Colorado Amendment 64 gave local governments the power to decide whether and how to permit recreational marijuana within their community. A 2014 annual report stated that as of that time 228 Colorado local jurisdictions had voted to ban medical and retail mari-

juana operations. The city of Pueblo banned recreational marijuana retail stores within city limits and had formerly placed a moratorium on medical marijuana dispensaries.

However, Pueblo County, which governs all unincorporated land in the county, acted differently, making marijuana businesses a by-right use in commercial and industrial districts, thereby allowing such businesses to avoid lengthy governmental reviews (§§17.120.190–240). In addition, the county also made marijuana cultivation a by-right use, apparently the first Colorado county to do so. The county also passed rules mandating a five-mile distance between hemp growing areas and existing marijuana growing areas so as to avoid cross-contamination (§17.120.280). In addition to land-use regulation, the Pueblo Board of Water Works passed its own resolution to address the fact that the Federal Bureau of Reclamation prohibits the use of federal water for marijuana cultivation (Resolution No. 2014-04). The water board subsequently concluded that they could lease up to 800 acre-feet of water to marijuana cultivators each year (Resolution No. 2014-05).

#### Seattle

Washington voters approved Initiative 502, legalizing recreational marijuana, in 2012. The year before, Seattle had passed Ordinance 123661, clarifying that all marijuana businesses, including manufacture, processing, possession, transportation, dispensing and the like, must be in compliance with all city laws, as well as applicable state laws. In 2013, the city amended its zoning ordinance to specify where larger-scale marijuana business activities could locate (§23.42.058). The specific activities include processing, selling, delivery, and the creation of marijuana-infused products and usable marijuana. While these activities are prohibited in residential, neighborhood commercial, certain downtown, and several historic preservation and other special-purpose districts, the zoning ordinance does not require a land-use permit to specifically conduct marijuana-related activities in industrial, most commercial, and a few downtown districts.

For example, an applicant who wishes to open a marijuana retail store or an agricultural application is required to get the applicable permit, but is not required to disclose that the use is marijuana related. The ordinance does, however, impose a size limit on indoor agricultural operations in industrial areas, but this applies to all agricultural uses in industrial areas,

not just marijuana production (§23.50.012, Table A, Note 14).

Meanwhile, state law further restricts permissible locations for marijuana businesses. The state will not grant a license to any marijuana business within 1,000 feet of an elementary or secondary school, playground, recreation center, child care center, park, public transportation center, library, or game arcade that allows minors to enter.

#### Oregon

The voters of Oregon passed Measure 91 in 2014, legalizing recreational marijuana and related businesses, and the legislature enacted HB 340 in July 2015, thereby establishing a regulatory framework for such businesses.

Farmland preservation is one of the major objectives of land-use regulation in Oregon. Following the passage of Measure 91, a “local option” was created, whereby a local government in a county where at least 55 percent of the voters opposed Measure 91 could opt out of permitting marijuana businesses. The local government had 180 days from the passage of HB 340 to choose to opt out. Local governments in counties where more than 45 percent of the voters supported Measure 91 could refer an opt-out measure to the local electorate for a vote.

Many local governments have chosen to opt out, including a number of rural towns and larger municipalities such as Grant’s Pass and Klamath Falls (Oregon Liquor Control Commission 2016). Medford has banned retail marijuana businesses but permits producers and processors. However, some of the towns and cities still need to hold a general referendum on the issue in November 2016.

Portland has chosen to take a two-pronged approach to the regulation of marijuana businesses. The city’s zoning authority has not adopted rules governing the zoning of marijuana businesses, but is applying the city’s general development rules to them. Those rules include such standards as setbacks, conditional uses, parking height limitations, lot coverage, and the like that are specific to each zone. Therefore, if a marijuana retail business wishes to locate in a retail district, it would be allowed to do so provided the proposed business complies with the relevant general development rules in that district. However, the city does require that such businesses get a special license, and the licensing provisions stipulate a 1,000-foot buffer between retail marijuana

businesses (Chapter 14B.130). As another example, Bend's development code allows retail marijuana businesses in commercial zones and production and processing in industrial zones with certain restrictions, including visual screening, security, and lighting requirements (Development Code §3.6.300.P).

Oregon state law requires non-opt-out rural counties to treat cultivation businesses as a permitted farm use in the farm use zone, but these counties have discretion about how they treat production in other zones. Clackamas County, for example, treats marijuana cultivation as a farm use in other natural resource zones, including forest zones and mixed farm-forest zones (§12.841).

### Denver

Denver licenses four types of retail recreational marijuana-related businesses: retail stores, optional premises cultivation, infused products manufacturing, and marijuana testing facilities (§§6-200–220). The city made a conscious decision not to regulate marijuana businesses as distinct land-use categories, but its licensing standards do cross-reference the zoning code. Denver also grandfathered business locations that existed before the licensing regulations were implemented. This mainly benefitted medical marijuana dispensaries that had been in place before Denver adopted a new zoning code in 2010.

The city regulates medical marijuana establishments under a separate set of provisions in the Health and Sanitation section of its code (§§24-501–515).

Denver currently prohibits medical and recreational retail stores in any residential zone, any “embedded retail” district (small retail district embedded in a residential district), any location prohibiting retail sales, and within 1,000 feet of any school or child care center, any alcohol or drug treatment facility, and any other medical marijuana center or dispensary or retail marijuana store. However, the distance requirements are computed differently for medical marijuana centers versus retail stores. The medical marijuana center regulations use a measurement called a “route of direct pedestrian access,” and the retail stores regulations use a computation “by direct measurement in a straight line.”

Denver's retail and medical marijuana regulations allow cultivation in any location where plant husbandry is a permitted use, and grandfathering is allowed in these zones. The regulations also allow licensing for marijuana-infused products on a lot in any zone where food preparation and sales or manufacturing, fabrication, and assembly are permitted.

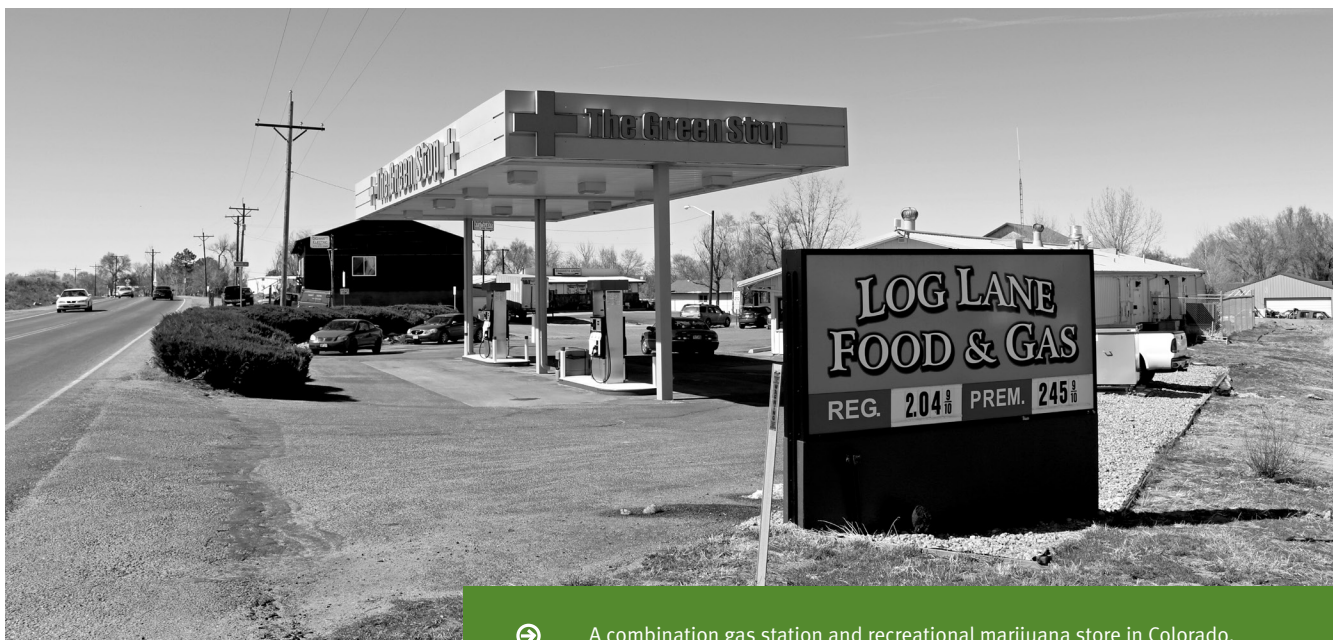
### PLANNING TO PLAN

Over my years as an attorney in the land-use arena, I have seen numerous towns and cities

start down the path of amending their land-use ordinance without answering certain basic questions. Often this is based on a failure to identify what sorts of as yet unheard-of businesses or other operations might, one day, file for site plan review—or, more troubling, *not* file for site plan review because the use is not covered by the land-use ordinance. However, it is at just this time that the local government must act thoughtfully and not overreact. Rather, the locality should answer certain questions.

First, should marijuana businesses be subject to special regulatory controls? If not, what category of use does a specific marijuana business fall into? Without special regulatory controls it will be governed just as any similar use is governed.

For example, California passed the first medical marijuana law in 1996, but since then there has been a problem defining a medical marijuana business. Is a dispensary retail or light industrial? Is a caregiver agricultural, home occupation, or light industrial? Is an outdoor cultivation operation agricultural and an indoor cultivation operation a home occupation or light industrial? Additionally, will the regulation of marijuana businesses include only land-use controls, only licensing requirements, or a combination of both? There are no clear answers to these questions, but in order to regulate successfully, each town must find its own answers.



Jeffrey Beall, Wikimedia (CC-by-3.0)



A combination gas station and recreational marijuana store in Colorado.

Additionally, since all operative medical and recreational marijuana laws are based on statewide statutes, a locality must also address whether a proposed ordinance is in compliance with state law. In most, if not all, statewide marijuana laws, there is either a statement, or an unstated inference that the state has occupied the field of marijuana regulation, and that local ordinances cannot conflict with, or frustrate the intent of, state laws.

Many courts throughout the country have expressed the following sentiment: “A municipality may prescribe the business uses which are permitted in particular districts but to prohibit the sale of all intoxicating beverages or other activities where such sale has been licensed by the state is to infringe upon the power of the state” (*Town of Onondaga v. Hubbell*, 8 N.Y.2d 1039 (1960)). Even home rule, in home-rule states, has its limitations.

Even using zoning in combination with business licensing can create problems. A case currently making its way through the Maine court system is a challenge to a local ordinance that requires medical marijuana caregivers to come to a public meeting in order to request a business permit.

The plaintiffs argue that the ordinance is a violation of state law, which clearly states that the identity of all caregivers must remain confidential, and makes disclosure of such information a civil violation with a fine imposed (*John Does 1–10 v. Town of York*, ALFSC-CV-2015-87). However, as caregivers begin to move away from home cultivation into leased industrial space, a town could conceivably require a non-caregiver landlord, who rents to caregivers, to obtain a business permit.

Conversely, under adult recreational statutes in those states that have legalized recreational marijuana—as well as under the initiatives to be voted on in November 2016—

the identity of the businesses seeking state licensure is not confidential. Municipalities and counties will therefore be able to determine the proposed business use, its suitability in a zone or district, and whether or not a business license is required, thereby moving marijuana land-use away from the often vague regulatory system of medical marijuana to the well-known structure of land-use regulation and business licensure.

Medical marijuana regulatory systems will still exist in most states that have legalized it, but it is likely that the majority of businesses in the marijuana sector will be recreational, rather than medical, and therefore more easily regulated by municipalities and counties.

## CONCLUSION

The public is overwhelmingly in support of legalization of recreational marijuana. A recent Associated Press/University of Chicago poll indicated that 63 percent of those polled support legalization, although when broken down into medical and recreational, a smaller number, yet still a majority, supported recreational. That said, however, 89 percent of millennials, now the country’s largest generation, support complete legalization (Bentley 2016). As with medical marijuana legalization, as more states legalize, even more states will likely follow suit.

It is, therefore, incumbent on towns, cities, and counties to become educated on their state’s statutes and the local regulations that have been passed or will likely be passed in the future, and to draft land-use ordinances that address, in the ways most appropriate to the locality, the proliferation of medical marijuana and recreational marijuana uses.

Since most states have not yet legalized recreational marijuana, now is definitely the time to study and address the land-use issues that legalization may raise.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lynne A. Williams is an attorney based in Bar Harbor, Maine, and she practices throughout the state. Her practice consists of land use, administrative litigation, and cannabis law. She was formerly the chair of the Bar Harbor Planning Board and is currently a member of the Harbor Committee of Bar Harbor.

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HOW DOES YOUR COMMUNITY  
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USES?

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