

Minutes of PSNA meeting, May 16, 2019

Two vendors seeking permits to open recreational cannabis stores in the neighborhood presented their plans and took questions. Our objective in this meeting was to get to know these folks, who want to be our neighbors.

The first, Porter Square Remedies, LLC, wants to occupy the space at 1908 Mass Ave where Wok 'n Roll did business; the second, Budega, Inc., is looking at the Stereo Jack's location at 1686 Mass Ave.

Both are family businesses and are represented by attorney Walter Sullivan, who has considerable experience with industries he described as "highly regulated pleasure," including alcohol and gambling, and now, cannabis. Both of his clients plan to sell recreational and medical cannabis. Both are in the process of preparing their applications to the state; neither had submitted. Both would have yet to appear before the planning board. Should their respective applications move through these processes smoothly, both could be in operation in about a year.

Porter Square Remedies, LLC

The folks behind Porter Square Remedies are Binoj Pradhan and his fiancé, Shweta Rajbhandari, who holds an MBA from Tufts. Pradhan currently runs businesses that sell or serve alcohol, including City Liquors in East Cambridge and the restaurant Masala in Teele Square, Somerville. He has purchased the property at 212 Hampshire St., site of Ryles, and plans to open a liquor store there, where he would be focusing on tastings for craft wine and beers.

Pradhan, who lives in Somerville near Porter Square, began by establishing his knowledge of the neighborhood, recounting his long patronage of businesses (many now closed) in the shopping center, and the common rite of passage: getting his car towed from the lot. He also recounted his history with opening and running businesses in the area, his membership in the local business associations, and his clean record with the city of Cambridge re: operations of his liquor stores.

Pradhan is proposing to sell recreational and medical marijuana. Initially, appointments will be required for the recreational sales so as to avoid lines on the sidewalk. He expects each transaction to run between 10 and 15 minutes, and a small waiting room will be available for those with appointments. Medical marijuana customers will be able to fill prescriptions without appointments.

To establish the security practices required for chain-of-custody of the product and admission of customers to the store, Pradhan has hired Rick Nava, whose career with the state police included setting up the cold case unit to handle unsolved murders cases. He was also involved in the inspection operation for the state warehouse that stored evidence in narcotics cases.

Nava described the security measures that he has designed for Porter Square Remedies.

- He plans to hire security staff from local police forces
- Employ ID scanners to authenticate driver's licenses, passports, and international IDs customers are required present
- Employ a system of surveillance cameras (films to be discarded after 90 days) and operational audits to ensure employees are consistent in compliance with state laws and regulations, including the chain-of-custody procedures. Nava believes that training has to be done daily.

Pradhan intends to hire local residents, at a starting rate of \$18.50/hour. As an immigrant from Nepal, his own experience of being overlooked in hiring informs a commitment to hire others who are also overlooked, which he described as veterans, the disabled, racial and cultural groups, LGBTQ, and women.

Budega, Inc.

The Halani family hopes to open Budega, Inc. The operational responsibility will fall to Sareena Halani and her brother, Arish. Their father, Sohail Halani, who has considerable experience with retail businesses in tax preparation, jewelry, and check-cashing, will be the executive advisor. One theme in the Halani's presentation was the long campaign waged to get their mother on board.

The Halanis plan to accommodate walk-ins right away and are planning their space to both handle the security required and to avoid long lines on the sidewalk. Their security plan, prepared by Minuteman Security, includes 21 cameras at different heights and scope, and some will include audio.

Operating hours are expected to be 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Sundays. They expect to have 10 full-time employees and 5 part-time employees.

The fate of Stereo Jack's was a big theme in the questions. Sullivan disclosed that the owner has been renting the space on a month-to-month at a lower-than-market rate for some years. The plans that the Halani's presented include space for Stereo Jack to continue in operation. They have expressed interest in maintaining the artwork and artifacts in the windows and in the area occupied by Budega.

The Halanis plan extensive renovations of the space to operate Bodega, with or without Stereo Jack's; these plans would involve the first floor and basement, where the administrative offices and other equipment would be placed.

Other information

The information provided from many questions asked of the Halanis apply to Pradhan also:

- Unlike liquor licenses, the special permits granted to open a marijuana store cannot be transferred.
- Security personnel will not be armed.
- Both are filing as woman-owned businesses; neither is filing as a social equity applicant.
- Social equity applications do not need to comply with the siting requirements with respect to the distance from other operators; they could be right next to each other.
- The experience in Washington State is that when more marijuana stores have opened, any queuing on the sidewalk is eliminated. Mr. Pradhan expects to abandon appointments to serve customers at that point.
- The trend in the commonwealth is that medical marijuana operations are also pursuing the recreational market.