

# Cannabis as an alternative to opiates and more dangerous drugs on the Downtown Eastside

October 20, 2020  
RTS 13316



In June 26, 2019, Council directed staff to:

1. Detail how City can enable and support ongoing cannabis research to address overdose crisis
2. Engage with LCRB, VANDU and people who use drugs
3. Identify options to access low-cost, legal cannabis in DTES
4. Review Section 11 of Zoning and Development By-law

# 1. Cannabis research – emerging evidence

Findings by Cannabis Research Scientist, M-J Milloy, at the BC Centre for Substance Use:

- Cannabis can be a form of harm reduction by reducing use of riskier substances such as illicit opioids
- Cannabis may have benefits for people being treated for opioid use, chronic pain, or at risk for injecting drugs
- Community-based projects to distribute free cannabis in the DTES may help with barriers to accessing cannabis

## 2. Engagement - What we heard

At a focus group held in November 2019 with VANDU members, CAT Safe Supply Working Group members and other people who use drugs, staff heard:

### **Cost**

- People using opioids and other substances may use cannabis as an alternative but if the price is too high, that option is not possible
- Edibles can be effective for pain and used as an alternative to opioids but they are even more expensive than other forms of cannabis and more difficult to access

### **Access**

- Fewer retail stores in DTES since legalization of cannabis
- People want to be able to access legal, affordable cannabis within a two-to-three block radius of where they live
- Not having a fixed address, credit card, ID or access to a health care provider are barriers to accessing medical cannabis

### 3. Access to cannabis: Government regulations

#### Federal

- Medical cannabis (sale and research)

#### Provincial

- Non-Medical cannabis (distribution, sale, price)

#### Municipal

- Zoning (land use), business licensing

# 3. Legal access to cannabis

- Purchase cannabis from government-operated BC Cannabis Store\*
- Purchase cannabis from licensed private retail stores\*
- Grow plants at home (up to four cannabis plants)
- Gift to another adult (personal possession up to 30 grams)

*\*Minimum pricing set by Province*

- Obtain authorization from health care provider to obtain cannabis for medical purposes and register with:
  - A licensed producer to purchase cannabis (sold online, delivered by mail)
  - Health Canada to produce a limited amount of cannabis
  - Health Canada to designate someone to produce cannabis on your behalf

# 4. Zoning and Development By-law

## SECTION 11.6.2\*

A cannabis store is not permitted:

- (a) within 300 m of another cannabis store;
- (b) within 300 m of a school – elementary or secondary, or community centre or neighbourhood house;
- (c) within the area outlined on the map attached, except for sites on Hastings Street or Main Street;
- (d) on any site on Granville Street between Robson Street and Pacific Boulevard;

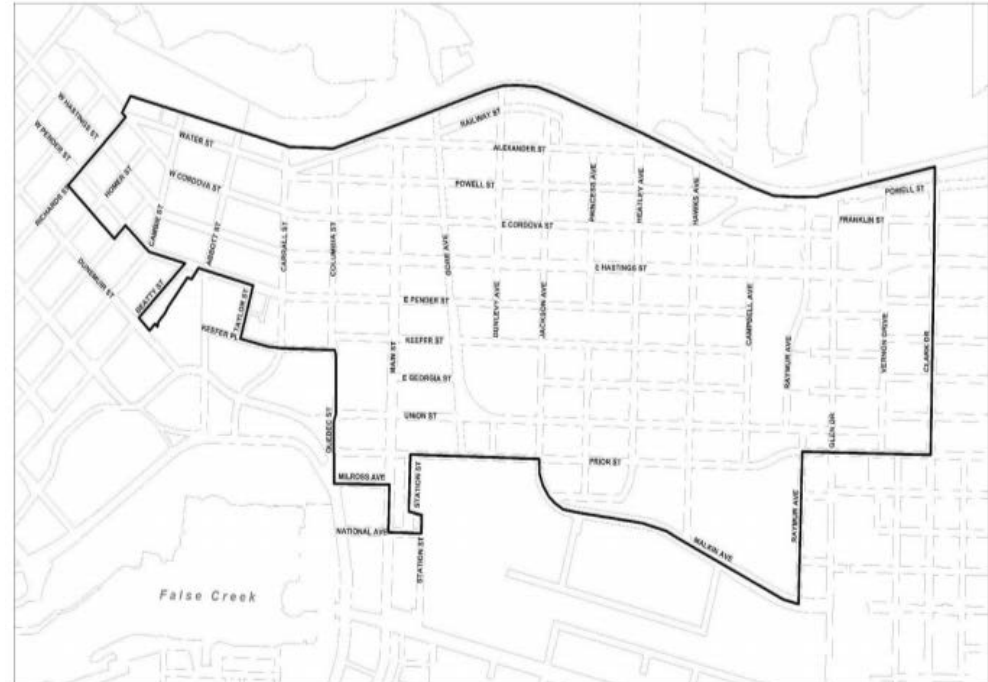
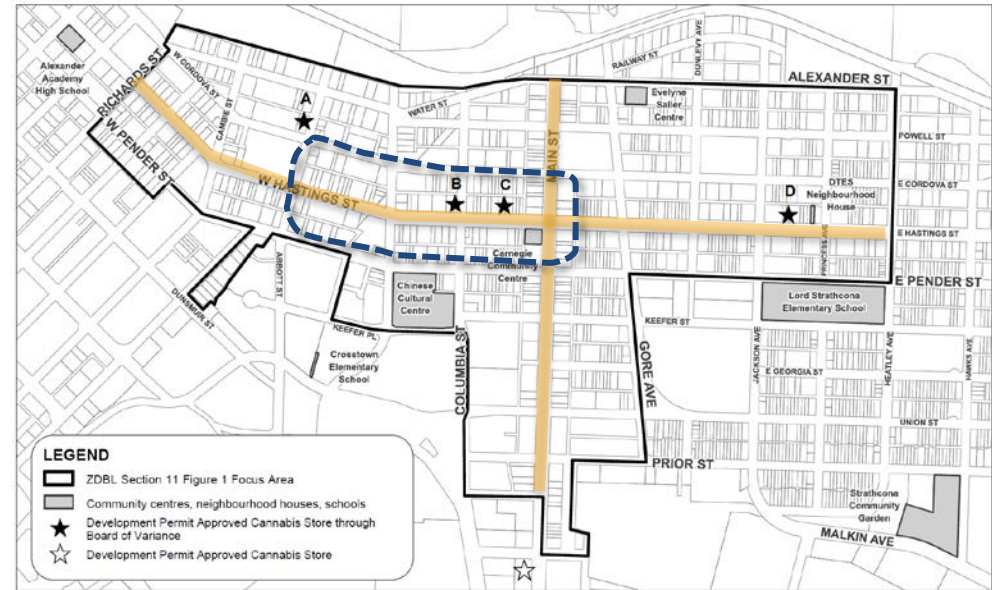


Figure 1 - Section 11

\*Section edited and reduced for presentation-  
Only provisions related to location included 7

# 4. Zoning and Development By-law

- Four cannabis store locations approved through the Board of Variance
- Removal of the 11.6.2 (c) restriction creates potential for two new store locations
- These are outside the preferred location for improved access identified in the focus group
- Store operating models and pricing are controlled by provincial regulations





- Staff will continue to support research initiatives that look at the role of cannabis in addressing the overdose crisis
- The City can advocate to higher levels of government and help to identify where there is a need for new legal options and pathways to increase access to cannabis in the DTES
- Should new cannabis regulations be introduced by the Provincial or Federal governments, staff will bring forward recommendations to Council to complement any new regulations

**THANK YOU!**

