

San Francisco pushes forward with legal marijuana sales

November 29 2017, by Janie Har



This Oct. 19, 2009 file photo shows a neon sign at the entrance to the San Francisco Medical Cannabis Clinic in San Francisco. San Francisco supervisors approved regulations for the sale of recreational marijuana following weeks of emotional debate over where to allow new stores. Rules approved by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors Tuesday, Nov. 28, 2017, call for a 600-foot (180-meter) buffer zone between stores and schools, comparable to the distance required for places that sell alcohol or tobacco. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

San Francisco leaders have overcome deep divisions about how to

regulate legal recreational marijuana in the densely packed city, approving pot-friendly rules that could allow sales to start the first week of January.

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors late Tuesday adopted regulations favored by [marijuana](#) advocates, rejecting attempts to mandate a larger barrier between schools and pot shops as well as provisions allowing neighborhoods to limit the number of dispensaries or ban them outright.

The rules also could help residents—largely African-Americans and Latinos—who have been disproportionately affected by marijuana-related arrests and convictions.

Pot advocate Patricia Barraza rallied before Tuesday's meeting, calling for supervisors to quickly approve rules allowing small marijuana businesses to start preparing for sales that become legal in California on Jan. 1. She said weed could be a major economic driver, particularly for people finding it hard to stay in pricey San Francisco.

"Your family can live in this city and thrive in this city by having your own business, it just happens that cannabis is the way to do that right now," she said.

It had been surprisingly difficult for the pot-friendly city to adopt local regulations required for growers and retailers to get a state permit. California voters approved legalizing recreational marijuana in 2016.



In this Tuesday, Nov. 21, 2017 file photo, demonstrators march in opposition to the legalization of marijuana in San Francisco. San Francisco supervisors approved regulations for the sale of recreational marijuana following weeks of emotional debate over where to allow new stores. Rules approved by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors Tuesday, Nov. 28, 2017, call for a 600-foot (180-meter) buffer zone between stores and schools, comparable to the distance required for places that sell alcohol or tobacco. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File)

A well-organized group of Chinese immigrants strongly opposed to marijuana had lobbied supervisors for larger buffer zones and neighborhood prohibitions that pot advocates said would strangle the industry.

San Francisco will not be ready for sales New Year's Day, but if Mayor Ed Lee approves the rules quickly, the city could be open for recreational pot at midnight Jan. 5, said John Cote, spokesman for the

city attorney's office. There are about 40 approved medical marijuana outlets that can start selling to adults that day.

For that to happen, Lee would need to sign the legislation Dec. 5 after the board votes on it a second time. His office did not return requests for comment.

The board approved a 600-foot (180-meter) buffer zone between pot shops and schools, rejecting attempts by Supervisor Katy Tang, who represents a heavily Asian district, for a 1,000-foot (305-meter) barrier. She also wanted the barrier to apply to child care centers.

She said she was confused by dual messages about marijuana: Is it a harmless product or something that should not have a heavy presence in neighborhoods, like liquor stores?



In this Tuesday, Nov. 28, 2017 photo, cultivator Carla Selvin rallies outside City

Hall to tout the benefits of marijuana and urge supervisors to pass pot-friendly regulations in San Francisco. Following weeks of emotional and detailed debate over where to allow new stores, San Francisco supervisors approved regulations for the sale of recreational marijuana when it becomes legal in California in January. (AP Photo/Janie Har)

"I just feel this huge push and pull between, well, it's harmful if there's so many in this one area but at the same time, they're not going to harm kids or youth," Tang said.

On the other end was Supervisor Hillary Ronen, who urged colleagues to embrace this "new exciting industry" and overturn the country's outdated notions about marijuana.

"I'm just shocked by my colleagues, quite frankly, on this board, and I don't understand why we're pretending that this is so dangerous for children," she said.

They set aside differences and approved the legislation 10-to-1.

Supervisor Ahsha Safai was the only person to vote no, saying that the board had not had enough time to hash out sensitive issues, such as neighborhood input and local zoning.



In this Tuesday, Nov. 28, 2017 photo, people for stricter regulations on the sale of recreational marijuana hold up signs while waiting to attend a hearing at City Hall in San Francisco. Following weeks of emotional and detailed debate over where to allow new stores, San Francisco supervisors approved regulations for the sale of recreational marijuana when it becomes legal in California in January. (AP Photo/Janie Har)

The board, however, had no problem agreeing to "equity" provisions that give permitting preference to marijuana businesses that commit to hiring locally and mentoring people from communities hit hard by the country's war on drugs.

The idea is to diversify the industry so minorities, veterans and other traditionally disadvantaged groups can share in what is sure to be a lucrative business, the board said.

"It's a temporary feeling of relief," Supervisor Malia Cohen said Wednesday. "We just created the parameters and the guidelines. I think the real work is going to be on the implementation side."

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