

Pot-use permits need more space

The history of Colorado's long experiment with cannabis legalization has been fueled by great energy among ganjapreneurs looking to try new marketplaces. Think back to the launch of legal pot sales on New Year's Day, 2014. Stores all over Denver and across the state were poised to open and plenty of others were already in the pipeline.

So it's truly odd that Denver's voter-approved pilot program freeing businesses to allow recreational cannabis use in their establishments is off to such a slow start as to be almost nonexistent.

We fear the city has overplayed its regulatory authority and deprived the four-year experiment a reasonable chance to succeed.

Passed in November 2016, the pilot was meant to allow permit applications to begin this summer. The city assembled a task force to help craft its regulations for the program and started considering applications at the end of August.

But only now has anyone come forward. As The Denver Post's Jon Murray reports, the owners of a pot shop in Lincoln Park wish to open a coffee shop that, for a \$5 fee, allows customers to also vape marijuana or consume pot edibles. The planned Coffee Joint venture appears to have met an important permit obligation in securing support from its neighbors.

Why the lack of interest? Mostly likely because, as supporters of the program argued this summer, Denver added rules that make gaining a permit nearly impossible in the most desirable areas in the city. While voters approved a plan that would require social-use permits, to remain 1,000 feet from schools, regulators said the businesses had to also be 1,000 feet from day care centers and drug and alcohol treatment centers.

We supported the 2016 ballot measure that created the pilot because it seeks to solve obvious problems for tourists and residents



Associated Press file

who wish to enjoy the drug much like others are allowed to enjoy beer, wine and spirits. State law forbids public use. State and local governments have been slow to craft rules of their own. Here is an effort to find solutions.

The measure voters approved was hardly a giveaway to would-be pot-offering establishments. Its requirements meant that permit-seekers must gain support from either a neighborhood association or business improvement district in its area, who could tailor rules for each permit. The City Council can scrap it after four years if the experiment isn't working, or after six months if problems arise.

Yes, there is the worry about Attorney General Jeff Sessions, an avowed anti-pot warrior who could wreak havoc here should he wish, given the remaining and wrongheaded federal prohibition on cannabis. The argument could be made that maybe keeping this newest version of the pot experiment tamped down makes sense while he's in office.

But the voters have spoken, and the spirit and language of the measure they supported has obviously been disregarded. That's just not kind.

Denver's regulators ought to re-think the stiffer-than-workable rules and give seekers of on-site pot-use permits more room. Supporters suggest a 500-foot buffer between shops and child care facilities, or the ability to craft waivers with such entities. That's a reasonable ask.

The members of The Denver Post's editorial board are William Dean Singleton, chairman; Mac Tully, CEO and publisher; Chuck Plunkett, editor of the editorial pages; Megan Schrader, editorial writer; and Cohen Peart, opinion editor.

Sen
Dem
purp