

OPTING IN WITH INTENTION: A FRAMEWORK FOR NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE



Rianna Ford, Founder & Director
July 15, 2025

The Bull & Blossom Initiative is a community-driven not-for-profit dedicated to fostering inclusion, equity, and empowerment in legal cannabis, event coordination, and entrepreneurship.



KEY POINTS

- Meet the Speaker: Rianna Ford
- Mississauga Success
- Competitive Cities
- NOTL Controlled Growth
- A Trusted Local Model: The Niagara Herbalist
- Embrace Opportunity. Empower Community.
- Thank You

MEET THE SPEAKER



Rianna Ford
*Founder & Director
Bull & Blossom
Initiative*

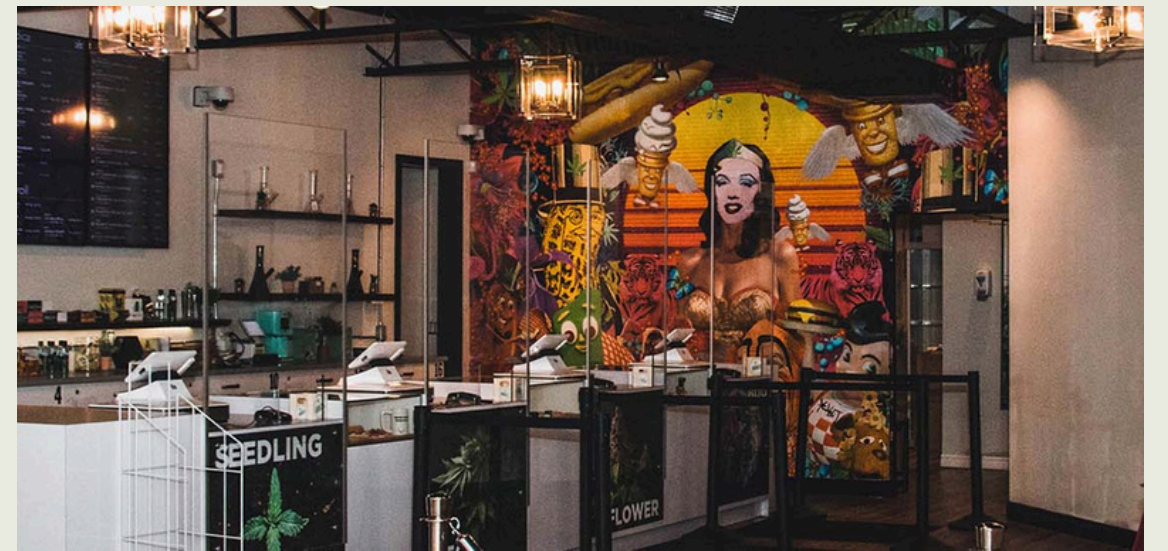
Experience:

- 360° legal cannabis industry experience
- Policy advocate for retail access
- Event and workforce program designer

Mission:

- Empower underrepresented communities
- Build inclusive cannabis and culture spaces
- Lead with equity, education & impact

Bull & Blossom: Community-driven. Equity-built.



MISSISSAUGA SUCCESS

Journey to legalization:

Dec 12 2018 – Council opts out amid clustering & control concerns

2019-2022 – Illegal shops proliferate; residents shop elsewhere

Apr 19 2023 – Rianna Ford deputation & Resolution 0103-2023 passes 8-4

Apr 20 2023 – Ban officially lifted; AGCO begins licensing

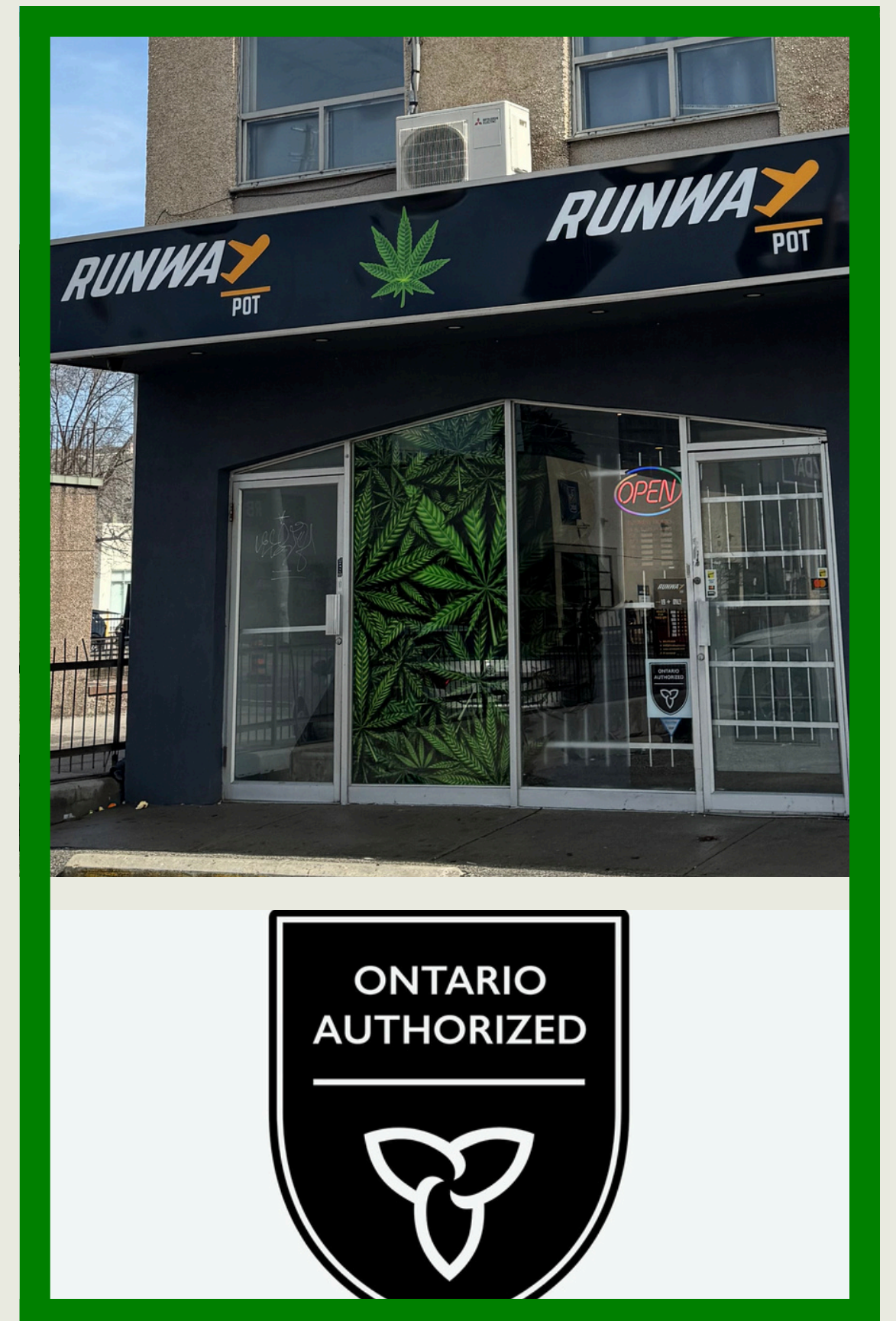
Arguments that won Council Support:

- Provincial data shows minimal ‘clustering’ in comparable cities
- Local jobs & storefront revitalization
- Public-health benefit: safe, tested products & dosage education
- Economic uplift without new municipal taxes
- Legal stores undercut black-market operators

First 12 months; 42 stores approved, first store opened May 26 2023 (corporate).

Hundreds of new jobs & landlord revenue. No zoning complaints related to odour or crowding.

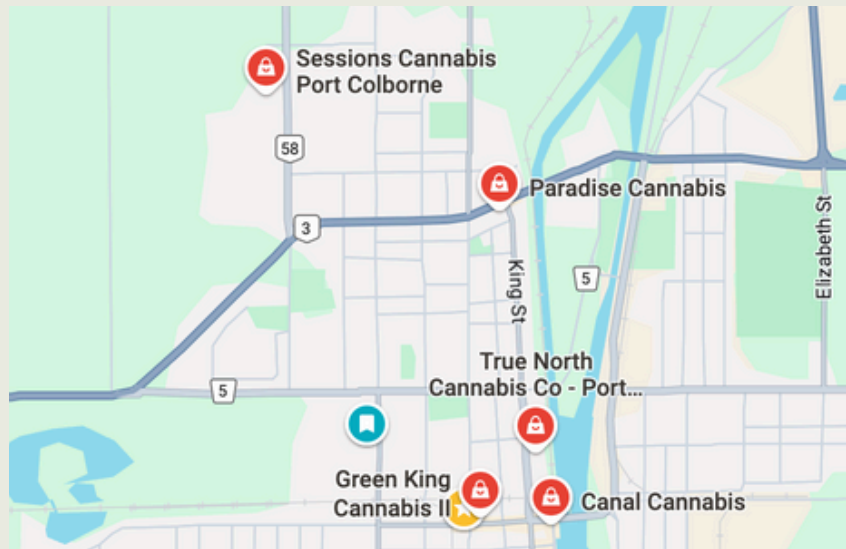
Illegal storefronts markedly reduced (Peel Police report), see following slide.



From left (red) to right (green), are photos of both illegal and legal cannabis neighbouring storefronts right on the corner of Hurontario and Dundas. Prior and during legalization Weed Releaf operated up until legal store front Runway Pot opened 2023 and successfully drove direct illicit competition out March 2025 (when photo was taken)

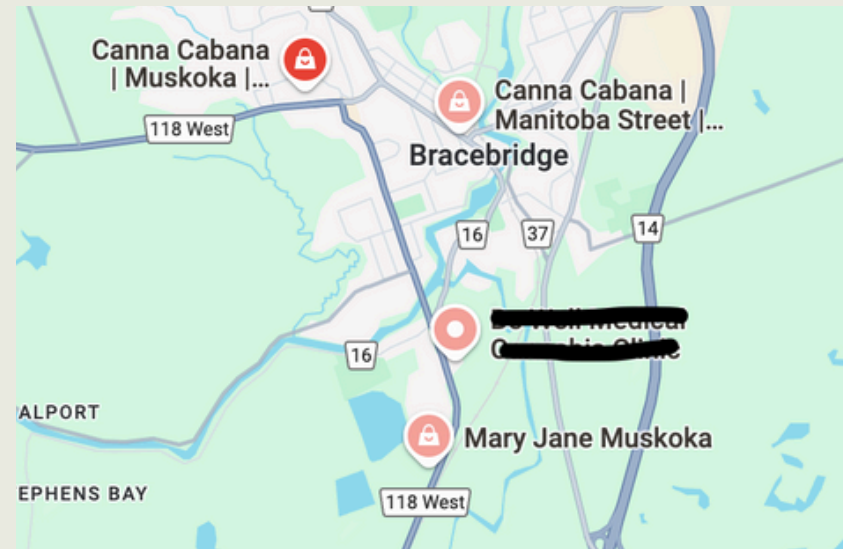
COMPETITIVE CITIES

Port Colborne, ON



- 20,033 population
- 5 legal storefronts total, 1 closure
- 2/5 store fronts are corporate

Bracebridge, ON



- 17,305 population
- 3 legal storefronts total, 1 closure
- 2/3 store fronts are corporate
- 1 illicit store

Cobourg, ON



- 20,159 population
- 5 legal storefronts total, 1 closure
- 2/5 store fronts are corporate

Niagara-on-the-Lake median population 19,088 in 2021. Similar cities population offer a maximum 5 stores with majority independent operated legal storefronts. There are cities like St. Mary's (7,386 population) that currently has only one store which is corporate.

N-O-T-L CONTROLLED GROWTH

Landlord & Retailer Vetting Strategy

- **Require proven** operating track-record & financial stability, focus solely on independent retailers
- **Mandate** heritage-compatible storefront designs
- **Community-benefit agreements** (local hiring, sponsorships)

Economic & Community Benefits

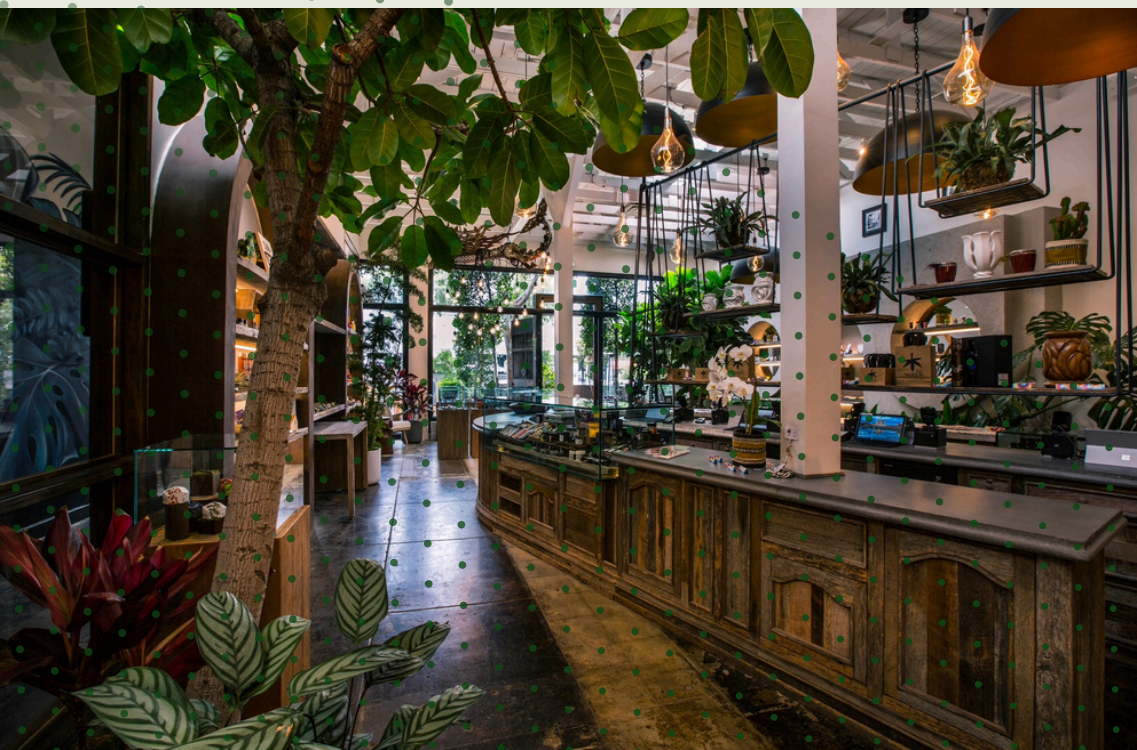
- **20-30 new direct jobs;** spin-off tourism partnerships
- **Rental income** for vacant or underused properties
- **Increased municipal share** of provincial excise funding
- **Enhanced visitor experience:** education/safe consumption, wine-&-weed tours, wellness retreats,

Addressing Common Concerns

- **Youth access** –strict ID checks; provincially mandated staff training
- **Traffic & parking** – data shows negligible impact
- **Public consumption** – remains regulated under Smoke-Free Ontario Act
- **Odour control** – modern HVAC & display regulations

Proposed Action Plan for Council

- **Host public info sessions** showcasing other municipal data
- **Pass resolution** to opt-in & notify AGCO
- **Publish voluntary** Cannabis Retail Design & Siting Guidelines
- **Review licence applications** quarterly with community input



A TRUSTED LOCAL MODEL: THE NIAGARA HERBALIST

33 Lakeshore Rd #15, St. Catharines, ON L2N 6E3

- **The Niagara Herbalist** (est. April 2019) — A fully independent, community-rooted dispensary and one of Ontario's original cannabis license lottery winners (2018)
- Co-owners **Jessica Bonilla, Max Bonilla and Kevin Trethowan**, have family footprints in Niagara region dating back to the 1950s, they cherish and understand the nuances of our community.
- Their motto “**One Location. Excellence, not Volume.**”
- Apart of **Ontario Living Wage Network**, pays above minimum wage and provides staff benefits
- Actively promotes **equity, education, and wellness** within the cannabis industry
- Leads **community-focused initiatives through HighQ** (adjacent studio): Painting workshops, Yoga sessions, Cannabis plant education
- **A model operator**: trusted, regulated, and deeply invested in local wellbeing



• Centre three co-owners TNH, far right former Mayor of St. Catharines



EMBRACE OPPORTUNITY. EMPOWER COMMUNITY.

- Independent retailers like The Niagara Herbalist prioritize community, not corporate expansion
- Local operators invest in staff wellbeing, education, and inclusion
- Supporting trusted independents ensures measured, values-aligned growth
- Niagara-on-the-Lake can shape a retail model that reflects its unique identity and priorities

Thank you.

