



Local Finance Opinion

LFO-2018-3
September 24, 2018

TOPIC: Money from Marijuana Establishments and Medical Marijuana Treatment Centers

ISSUE: Accounting treatment of local option excises on retail sales of marijuana for adult use and impact fees and any other payments required or received from marijuana establishments and medical marijuana treatment centers in connection with their operation

This LFO addresses questions and provides guidance regarding the municipal finance law and accounting treatment of money from marijuana establishments and medical marijuana treatment centers. It does not address how payments by those establishments or treatment centers are treated for purposes of host community agreements.

1. What is the general rule about accounting for money received by a city, town or district officer or department?

All money received or collected by a city, town or district from any source is credited to its general fund and can only be spent after appropriation unless a general or special law provides for an exception and different treatment, *i.e.*, a general or special law expressly reserves the revenue stream for expenditure for a particular purpose or allows expenditure by a municipal or district department or officer without appropriation. [G.L. c. 44 § 53](#).

2. What money could a marijuana establishment or a medical marijuana treatment center generate for a municipality?

Municipalities may (1) impose a local excise on the retail sales of marijuana for adult use and (2) negotiate impact fees or other payments under a community host or other agreement with a marijuana establishment or medical marijuana treatment center in connection with its siting and operation in the municipality.

3. How does a municipality impose a local excise on retail sales of marijuana for adult use?

A city or town may impose a local excise on the retail sale of marijuana for adult use by accepting [G.L. c. 64N, § 3](#). Acceptance is by majority vote of the community's legislative body, subject to charter. The maximum excise rate communities may impose is 3%. If a city or town in which a marijuana retailer is located accepts G.L. c. 64N, § 3, all sales by the marijuana retailer that are subject to the state excise on marijuana retail sales will also be subject to the host community's local excise. The excise does not apply to the sale of marijuana or marijuana products by a medical marijuana treatment center. [G.L. c. 64N, § 4](#). See [Bulletin 2018-3, Local Excise on Retail Sales of Marijuana for Adult Use](#).

4. How does a municipality obtain impact fees or other payments from a marijuana establishment or medical marijuana treatment center?

A marijuana establishment or a medical marijuana treatment center that wants to operate or continue to operate in a municipality must execute a community host agreement with the municipality. [G.L. c. 94G, § 3\(d\)](#). The community host agreement must include, but is not limited to, all responsibilities of both parties with respect to the operation of the establishment or center within the municipality. The agreement may include payment of a community impact fee by the marijuana establishment or medical marijuana treatment center in order to mitigate the costs imposed upon the municipality by the operation of the establishment or treatment center within its borders. [G.L. c. 94G, § 3\(d\)](#).

5. Is there an exception to the general rule for money related to the operation of a marijuana establishment or medical marijuana treatment center?

No. There is no general law that establishes a different accounting treatment for (1) revenues generated by the local sales excise on retail sales of marijuana for adult use or (2) payments made under community host or other agreements with marijuana establishments or medical marijuana treatment centers. Therefore, the money belongs to the general fund and can only be spent by appropriation. [G.L. c. 44 § 53](#).

6. How do accounting officers treat money related to the operation of a marijuana establishment or medical marijuana treatment center?

Accounting officers must credit all of the following to the general fund:

1. Collections from local option excises on retail sales of marijuana for adult use and
2. Payments made by a marijuana establishment or medical marijuana treatment center regardless of the characterization of the payments by the parties.

State law governs the municipal finance and accounting treatment of payments made by a marijuana establishment or medical marijuana treatment center, not a host community or other agreement between the municipality and the establishment or treatment center. It is not within our regulatory purview to determine the nature of those payments for purposes of [G.L. c. 94G, § 3\(d\)](#). For municipal finance law purposes, however, payments made by an establishment or treatment center under a host community or other agreement in connection with, or to mitigate the costs imposed by, the location and operation of the establishment or treatment center within the municipality are in the nature of exactions or mitigation payments that belong to the general fund. They cannot be reserved in or credited to a separate gift or grant account, trust fund, revolving fund or other special revenue fund and cannot be spent without appropriation or appropriated as an available fund. They belong to the general fund because no general law establishes a different accounting treatment for money related to the operation of these establishments or treatment centers specifically or from exactions or mitigation payments generally.

We understand that some of these agreements have characterized all or some of the payments as gifts or gifts in the nature of trusts. However, a payment made by a private party to a municipality in connection with a regulated activity, contract or other municipal action is not a gift, donation or grant within the meaning of and for the purposes of [G.L. c. 44, § 53A](#). Therefore, it may not be accounted for in a separate account and spent without appropriation. These payments lack the donative intent that is an essential characteristic of the genuine gift required by that statute. A gift is ordinarily defined as a

voluntary payment of money or transfer of property made without consideration. Although a private party's decision to engage in a regulated activity or contract with a municipality may be one of choice, it is doing so with the expectation of receiving valuable consideration in return, *i.e.*, a privilege or benefit, or some municipal action or authorization. In this case, the execution of a host agreement is a condition precedent to being able to operate or continue to operate as a licensed marijuana establishment or registered medical marijuana treatment center. It is doubtful that any payments the establishment or treatment center agree to make are for a purpose other than to obtain the necessary host agreement. "[T]he nature of a monetary exaction must be determined by its operation rather than its specially descriptive phrase." [Emerson College v. Boston](#), 391 Mass. 415, at 424 (1984), quoting [Thomson Electric Welding Company v. Commonwealth](#), 275 Mass. 426, at 429 (1931).

7. Is there a way under state law that a municipality may dedicate payments made by a marijuana establishment or medical marijuana treatment center for later appropriation for particular purposes?

Yes. A municipality may use a local acceptance option to dedicate all, or a portion of at least 25%, of the collections of the excise on retail sales of marijuana or payments from a community host and other agreement payments to a general or special purpose stabilization fund established under [G.L. c. 40 § 5B](#). For the procedure that must be followed to accept and use this local option, see Section II of [Informational Guideline Release \(IGR\) No. 17-20, Stabilization Funds](#). Under this option, these collections and payments may be dedicated to stabilization funds because they are not earmarked for a particular purpose under current state law. In addition, the excise on marijuana retail sales is not a locally assessed tax or excise specifically excluded from dedication.

8. How will the Bureau of Accounts treat balance sheet reservations of payments from a marijuana establishment or medical marijuana treatment center when certifying free cash?

The Bureau of Accounts will close balance sheet reservations of payments from marijuana establishments or medical marijuana treatment centers when calculating the available funds of a municipality (free cash). [G.L. c. 59, § 23](#). This is consistent with its policy with respect to similar payments made under host, development or other agreements with other private parties that also belong to the general fund.

9. What agency has regulatory jurisdiction over issues related to the operation of marijuana establishments or medical marijuana treatment centers?

The state's [Cannabis Control Commission](#) determines whether marijuana establishments or medical marijuana treatment centers meet licensing or registration standards required to operate. Questions regarding the interpretation of the statute, regulations and other guidance related to the implementation of marijuana for adult use or medical purposes should be directed to the Commission.



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