

# Detroit Free Press

## Zap Zone founder builds massive entertainment facility with arcade, restaurants, glow golf



**Chanel Stitt**

Detroit Free Press

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Gaz Ismail, the founder of Zap Zone fun centers, has been purchasing plots of land in Pittsfield Township since 1999.

And now, something BIG is coming.

That's the tagline being used by Ismail's new 74,000-square-foot entertainment center that is almost fully open in Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor area. Best in Games brings a variety of experiences: a glow golf selfie museum, indoor go-karting, a ninja warrior course, a drop tower, axe throwing, football bowling, trampolines, bumper cars, virtual reality, laser tag and more than 125 arcade games.

Ismail wants the entertainment space, located at 4095 Carpenter Road, to be an immersive experience for children, teenagers and adults. He wants to see corporate parties and bonding taking place, but also birthday parties and everyday fun.



“I was working on something that could fulfill everybody,” said Ismail, 51 of Novi. “So it was very difficult to put together. And everyone told me you cannot entertain adults and kids in the same place.”

But he made it happen. The large game room separates people in the restaurants from those using the rides and ninja warrior course. Ismail also took some inspiration from casinos, where the aisles have 7-foot walking gaps. And the third floor, which holds the go-karting, fowling and a bar, feels like a different building.

The experiences start outdoors, where there will be fire pits lining the patio. When walking into the space on the first floor, you’ll see a restaurant surrounded by several big-screen TVs and several activities on each floor that can fill a whole day.



The menu at Rocko’s Bar and Grill includes pasta and steak entrees, hamburgers, sandwiches, salads and vegetarian options. The other bars are Candy Club Bar and Pit Bar.

The third floor, which is fully operational, includes the indoor go-karting, classic arcade games and fowling. The rest of the space will be opening near the end of the month.

Ismail said, "It's relaxing — nice sound music, you're people watching, got a lot of room, you got a bar there if you want to drink." The relaxing feeling occurs until you're wearing a helmet and driving 45 mph in a go-kart.



The entertainment center will replace the Zap Zone on Carpenter Road and has one of the first laser tag spaces with an open window where you can be on the first floor and see people play the game. The laser tag is part of the area where visitors can access more than over 10 activities at \$39 for two hours. Ismail said it was important to keep the affordability of laser tag, which is typically \$9 a game, but add more experiences to the price.

Ismail can come up with a major project idea and see it to fruition, sometimes within two weeks. And he always says, "Go big or go home."

He came up with the concept called "golfie," which is the combination of an immersive selfie museum and putt putt golf with 18 holes and 20 photo opportunities. While putt putting, you can sit on a replica of "The Simpson's" set, walk through "Alice in Wonderland," say hello to "SpongeBob" and see what a Candy Land world looks like.





The go-karting track is inside. With the use of electric go-karts and a ventilation system, the company was able to create a safe indoor option for the track.

## Becoming the next big thing

Ismail is from Canada. When he moved to Michigan, he opened his first Zap Zone in Canton, and later expanded to Ann Arbor, Battle Creek, Brighton, Farmington, Lansing, Taylor, Sterling Heights, Waterford and Windsor. He's also the owner of Bonaventure Skating Center in Farmington Hills, Rollerama in Brighton, Escape Room-Zone, which has five locations, and Azra Chamber of Horrors in Madison Heights.



When he bought his first plot of land where the entertainment center is now located, he intended to build something. But there wasn't enough space. As the years went by, he continued to purchase land.

"I didn't realize how expensive it would be to build (from) the ground up," Ismail said. "As I would keep obtaining land, I would build the Zap Zones bigger and better. ... It took my 30 years of experience building Zap Zones through the years to build this magnitude of nuclear unbelievable fun."

Pittsfield Township Supervisor Mandy Grewal has been working for 14 years to make community-centric spaces focusing on people, which she calls "the heartbeat of the county."

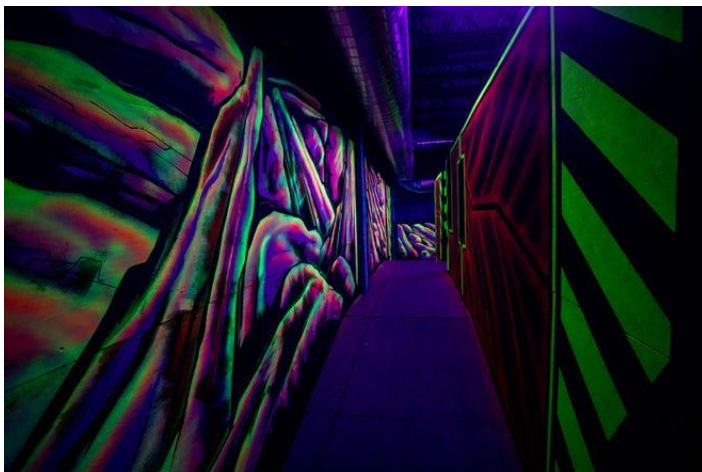


"We created mixed-use-based districts about 10 years ago to provide for these destination spots where folks would come and recreate through parks or different forms of engagement," Grewal said.

"I think what Gaz is doing is very representative of creating a community-centric space," said Grewal, "which is centrally located for folks to get to, from not just all around Washtenaw County, but really the region, and come together to enjoy each other and promote a positive vibe."

Grewal said Ismail has been having conversations about his ideas for about seven years.

The design process started in 2017. The groundbreaking happened in 2019. Now, the space can hold about 1,000 people. With the addition of Best In Games, he is expecting to bring about 150 jobs to the area, full- and part-time positions such as customer service, attraction operations, bartenders, sales, waitstaff and hosts.



"I feel like not only is this new adventure by Gaz (adding) more jobs, but (it is adding) the type of jobs, which are so valuable to the working class, the front line worker jobs; we can add to the diversity of the jobs that we can support here in our community," Grewal said.

Ismail said, "With the right people behind me, if I want to do it, we could become national because it's got the national vibe. Right now I'm just gonna take it in and enjoy this place."



## Pittsfield Charter Township

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### *Office of the Supervisor*

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#### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Pittsfield Township Planning Commission & Board of Trustees

**FROM:** Mandy Grewal, Ph.D., Supervisor

**DATE:** May 13, 2022

**SUBJECT:** Master Plan Update Revised Process Timeline

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Last week the Municipal Services Department became aware of the fact that some of the notification required as part of the Master Plan update process was not undertaken. While letters were diligently and explicitly sent to property owners impacted by the proposed redistricting through expansion of the Mixed Use districts at State/Textile and Carpenter/Packard, the pro-forma letters required to be sent to surrounding jurisdictions and regional planning agencies informing them of the master plan update were not sent out.

The issue was brought to the Municipal Services' Department via the Clerk's Office as a result of Ms. Lirones' due diligence. To rectify matters, the Planning Department (Mr. Ben Carlisle) sent out the pro-forma notifications on Friday, May 6<sup>th</sup>. As such, the 63 public review period will now extend through July 7<sup>th</sup> and the master plan will be presented to the Planning Commission for review/approval on July 21<sup>st</sup> and the Board of Trustees following that.

We wanted to be sure to make you aware of these revisions and thank you for your continued support, input, and partnership.

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# Marijuana is coming to Pittsfield Township, with revenues dedicated to systemic change

Published: May. 12, 2022, 11:03 a.m.



The Pittsfield Township Board of Trustees and other elected officials stand with members of Washtenaw My Brother's Keeper following the board's vote on Wednesday, May 11, 2022 to pass rules allowing marijuana sales in the township and dedicate cannabis sales tax revenues the local government receives to the group focused on empowering young men of color. Lucas Smolcic Larson | [lsmolciclaron@mlive.com](mailto:lsmolciclaron@mlive.com)

By [Lucas Smolcic Larson | lsmolciclaron@mlive.com](mailto:lsmolciclaron@mlive.com)

WASHTENAW COUNTY, MI – Marijuana sales will soon be permitted in Pittsfield Township, opening up a potential windfall of tax revenue.

Elected leaders know exactly where they'll spend it.



On Wednesday, May 11, they OK'd [rules allowing marijuana businesses in certain areas](#), capping a years-long drafting process. At the same time, they committed to donating net revenues they collect as a result to Washtenaw My Brother's Keeper, an Obama-era White House initiative focused on empowering boys and young men of color.

"It sends a very, very clear message that the reason our community supports having these businesses here is to take one small step in correcting decades, generations of disparities that have been hardcoded, again and again," said township Supervisor Mandy Grewal, referencing the disproportionate effect of marijuana prohibition and enforcement on minority communities.

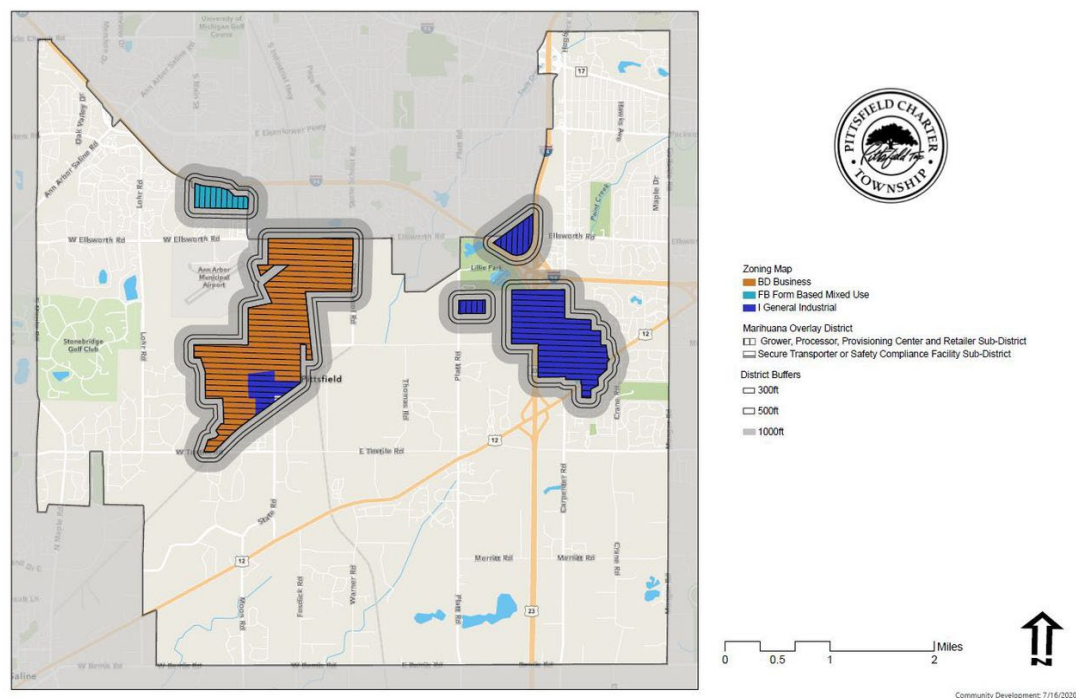
"We will not do that here in Pittsfield Township," she said.

The Wednesday votes put the township on the verge of joining its pro-marijuana neighbors, which now include Ann Arbor, Saline and Ypsilanti, as well as other Washtenaw County communities.

The marijuana rules passed unanimously on first reading, establishing zoning "overlay districts," designating where certain kinds of both medical and recreational cannabis operations can locate.

Retail shops, indoor growers and processing centers will be allowed in the commercial areas off State Circle, Platt Lane and a part of the Ellsworth Road corridor just northwest of the I-94 and U.S. 23 junction.

Other, more industrial areas of the township will allow secure transporter and safety compliance facilities, generally warehouses consistent with the surrounding businesses.



A map included in Pittsfield Township board documents shows the boundaries of marijuana overlay districts regulating where different kinds of marijuana businesses can locate in certain areas of the township. Rules allowing marijuana sales passed unanimously on first reading on Wednesday, May 11, 2022. Captured from Pittsfield Township meeting documents. The rules place no cap on the number of marijuana businesses, but require 1,000 foot buffers from places of worship, schools and childcare facilities, as well as 500 feet between marijuana facilities and 300 feet from public parks – effectively limiting the total number of businesses that can locate in the township.

They'll have to go through a site plan review and conditional use process before the township planning commission, which can place reasonable conditions on the projects and will hold public hearings on each, according to township planning consultant Ben Carlisle.

The ordinances establishing the rules will be back before the board for a second and final reading, though elected officials raised no objections on Wednesday.

They are a long time coming.

In 2018, 63% of township residents voted in favor of the statewide ballot measure to legalize recreational marijuana, though officials opted for a cautious approach and didn't immediately welcome the industry.

Now, cities and counties across the state are reaping hundreds of thousands of dollars in tax revenue from recreational cannabis sales.

[Washtenaw County and Ann Arbor topped the list of Michigan localities raking in the funds this year](#), taking in \$1.8 million and \$1.4 million respectively, based in part on the number of licensed marijuana businesses within their jurisdictions.

But, she added, based on this year's tax revenue distribution from the state, that figure could be more like \$100,000 or \$200,000, depending on how many retailers come to the township.

The influx is a "great opportunity," she said, referencing the decision to donate net proceeds to My Brother's Keeper.

The organization has a long history in Washtenaw County, which became among the first in the nation to sign on to the Obama initiative focused on addressing opportunity gaps for young people of color.

Among its initiatives is [Formula 734](#), a hip-hop album and documentary project crafted by an intergenerational group of young people and local artists and released in 2020, now in its second iteration.

On Wednesday, Jamall Bufford, a leader of the initiative and project specialist for My Brother's Keeper, praised Pittsfield leaders for setting aside structural funding for the group's programming.

"We think this could be a big step toward some of the systemic change that we want to see in our community for our black and brown young people," he said.

Elected officials echoed that sentiment.

"I can think of no better investment than the investment that we are hopefully going to make to the young men of this community," said township Trustee Linda Edwards-Brown. "If not now, when?"