

Supervisors hear complaints about medical marijuana farms

By **Anne Ternus-Bellamy** From page A1 | October 14, 2015

WOODLAND — When Yolo County supervisors decided in July not to immediately move forward with an ordinance placing limits on outdoor medical marijuana growing, several supervisors cited the absence of complaints from residents that pot farms had, in fact, become a problem.

Elsewhere, cities and counties have restricted — or in some cases, banned — pot cultivation locations as well as how many plants they can grow, citing neighbors' complaints about odors and criminal activity.

When a similar ordinance was put before supervisors in July, three of five supervisors expressed reluctance to regulate pot farms the same way, given that they'd heard few complaints locally.

"I'm feeling not ready to act on this," Supervisor Don Saylor of Davis said at the time. "I don't know how many complaints have come forward. I know in other counties and cities, it's been a tremendous problem, but I'm not hearing (complaints)."

Supervisor Matt Rexroad of Woodland suggested that outdoor marijuana cultivation "is happening all over Yolo County ... and we have maybe one complaint. I haven't heard any cases of people trying to steal each other's pot and having a shootout on a rural country road.

"If it becomes a big problem, I'm willing to regulate it," he added.

On Tuesday, public comment during the Board of Supervisors meeting indicated that outdoor medical marijuana cultivation indeed may have become a problem in rural Yolo County. As a result, supervisors likely will take another look at the proposed ordinance.

A handful of residents testified Tuesday about pot farms in their rural neighborhoods — primarily along County Roads 96 and 98 west of Woodland.

Ronald Wrobel, who lives on Road 96 just outside Woodland, said the property next to his currently has 99 marijuana plants growing, producing "a horrible, horrible smell" — a smell so bad, he said, that when he goes to meet a client, they can smell it on him and ask, "Are you growing pot?"

"That's embarrassing," Wrobel said.

“We have small children who live on that road (and) this is detrimental to these children. Unsavory people come by.”

His wife, Judy Wrobel, added that the plants are guarded by individuals with guns.

“My concern is for the kids,” she said. “My granddaughter loved to go down and play with the neighbors but we can no longer do that. We can no longer have barbecues in my back yard. Those guys have guns and we can see them.”

Vince Elwood, who lives on Road 98B, said there are three marijuana farms within 100 yards of his house “and I get that smell all the time.”

“Traffic has increased (with) people going over there and leaving at all times of day or night,” Elwood said. “It’s just getting to be too much.”

He added that burglaries and even a home invasion robbery have occurred, both of which he believes are related to the marijuana.

Cheri Battaglia, who lives on Road 96, also noted the proximity of a school bus stop, and said, “every single child gets dropped off and they have to walk past that marijuana.”

The concerns raised during Tuesday’s public comment period echoed what the Yolo County Sheriff’s Department and the District Attorney’s Office had reported earlier this year, leading to the draft ordinance that was presented to county supervisors in July.

The proposal would have limited outdoor medical marijuana cultivation to no more than 12 plants per parcel and required setbacks that would limit cultivation near schools, school bus stops, treatment centers and other locations.

At the time, Assistant County Counsel Carrie Scarlata said she did not have an exact number of complaints received from county residents about pot farms, but said, “my impression is there have been a fair number.”

Supervisors Oscar Villegas of West Sacramento — which has already banned outdoor medical marijuana cultivation — and Duane Chamberlain of the rural 5th District expressed support for the ordinance back in July and Chamberlain urged his colleagues on Tuesday to act sooner rather than later.

“I need some action on this,” Chamberlain said. “There’s something wrong here big-time.”

“This is certainly a concerning matter,” Saylor said.

Because the matter was not on Tuesday’s agenda but arose during public comment, supervisors were limited in any action they could take, but County Counsel Phil Pogledich

told them the draft ordinance could come back before the board for a hearing before the end of the year.

“I would like to see that come back as soon as possible,” Supervisor Jim Provenza said.

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