

## **County supervisors support continued commercial cannabis cultivation**

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WOODLAND — Yolo County supervisors voiced their support Tuesday for continuing to allow commercial cultivation of medical cannabis on unincorporated land and likely will place a tax on cannabis on the June 2018 ballot to fund additional law enforcement, address health impacts and more.

The board directed staff to return with an ordinance in September that would make permanent much of what is in the current interim ordinance, which allows commercial cultivation on up to one acre of land.

Modifications would include converting the program to a land-use process — rather than the current business license process — whereby those interested in acquiring a permit to cultivate medical cannabis would go through the county's planning department, with notice to adjacent neighbors being provided.

Other modifications would include increasing the buffer between cannabis grows and neighboring residences as well as between grows and city boundaries.

The new ordinance also would create pilot programs for nurseries and drying/hand-trimming facilities.

A standing-room-only crowd filled the Board of Supervisors chambers Tuesday morning with many more people sitting outside the chambers. More than 25 people spoke during public comment period — the majority urging the board to continue allowing commercial medical cannabis cultivation.

The board ultimately voted 4-1 to direct staff to come back with a permanent ordinance and prepare ballot language for a tax measure. Supervisor Matt Rexroad of Woodland voted against the motion.

"I would prefer that this be an unregulated industry just like every other ag product we have in Yolo County," Rexroad said, adding, "I have no desire to tax this crop any more than corn or tomatoes."

Currently, there are 64 licensed commercial cultivators of medical cannabis in Yolo County. Another 20 and 25 people obtained permits prior to a moratorium being issued by supervisors last fall but they have not yet completed the application process.

Agriculture Commissioner John Young told county supervisors he believes those 20 to 25 outliers are land speculators who may have obtained a permit simply to increase the value of their land.

"I would like to see them go away," Young said.

With a packed Board of Supervisors Chamber behind her, Heidi D'Agostino, an enforcement officer with the Yolo County District Attorney's Office, said, "Illegal (cannabis) grows have been our biggest challenge." Sue Cockrell/Enterprise photo

As part of their direction to staff, supervisors requested that those individuals be contacted and notified that they should complete the process by an unspecified deadline or the permit essentially would expire.

Whether the county ultimately would allow the program to grow beyond the 85 to 90 permits issued before the moratorium was unclear Tuesday.

County Counsel Phil Pogledich told supervisors the process of transitioning cannabis cultivation to a land-use program could take until early 2018 and new applications for permits would not be accepted until after that.

Supervisor Duane Chamberlain of the rural 5th District said he wants to keep the moratorium on new growers in place “until we get this thing figured out,” while Supervisor Jim Provenza of Davis cautioned the audience that “the board hasn’t decided to grow the program.”

But supervisors did voice support for allowing nurseries and drying/hand-trimming facilities under the ordinance and likely would start with pilot programs.

Other priorities for supervisors include cracking down on an unknown number of unlicensed — and therefore illegal — commercial cultivators operating throughout the county.

Heidi D’Agostino, an enforcement officer with the Yolo County District Attorney’s Office, said, “Illegal grows have been our biggest challenge.”

A crowd overflows into the lobby outside the Board of Supervisors’ Chambers during Tuesday’s cannabis hearing. Sue Cockrell/Enterprise photo

“To the extent that we have legal grows that are competing with (illegal grows), that is an unfair business practice,” she noted.

Additional enforcement targeting illegal growers could be made possible under a tax measure supervisors said they want to place on the June 2018 ballot.

A tax on cannabis cultivation could be used to pay for additional law enforcement, policy development, health impacts, education and environmental cleanup. Supervisors Jim Provenza of Davis and Oscar Villegas of West Sacramento both suggested the continuation and any expansion of the cannabis cultivation program should be contingent on whether voters pass a cannabis tax.

Staff is expected to return to the board at the Sept. 12 meeting with language for a new ordinance as well as tax options.