

County supervisors move forward with cannabis tax

By Anne Ternus-Bellamy

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WOODLAND — Yolo County residents likely will see a cannabis tax on the June ballot after the Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 Tuesday to bring back an ordinance for final approval at its next meeting.

The general tax — requiring majority approval by voters — would be between 1 and 15 percent of gross receipts, with an initial rate of 4 percent on cultivation activities and 5 percent on all other commercial cannabis activities. The tax would apply only to medical cannabis activities in unincorporated areas of the county.

Supervisors would have the ability to increase or decrease the tax annually by no more than 2 percent.

As a general tax, revenues raised will not go into a specific fund, but supervisors voiced support for a resolution Tuesday that reflects their desire that the money be used for criminal enforcement of illegal cultivation, early childhood and youth education and development, substance abuse education and treatment for children and adults, rural infrastructure and programs, and cannabis research.

Should the tax measure pass, a citizens' oversight committee would be appointed to review how the revenue is spent.

The board's vote Tuesday — with Supervisor Matt Rexroad of Woodland dissenting — follows frequent discussions by the board over the past two years about the place of commercial medical cannabis cultivation in Yolo County.

Under an existing interim ordinance, commercial cultivation is allowed by permit but the ordinance has been amended several times in the last year and a half to further restrict where cultivation is allowed and to limit the total number of permitted growers allowed.

The board frequently has been split on those votes, with three supervisors — Jim Provenza of Davis, Oscar Villegas of West Sacramento and Duane Chamberlain of the rural 5th District — generally favoring restrictions on cannabis cultivation and expressing at times a willingness to ban commercial activities altogether.

Meanwhile, Supervisors Don Saylor of Davis and Matt Rexroad of Woodland have generally been more supportive of the burgeoning cannabis industry locally and tended to vote against efforts to restrict cannabis activities.

Saylor and Rexroad both voted against inserting a poison pill in the current interim ordinance that required that a cannabis tax be placed on the ballot — and voters to approve it — or the ordinance would sunset. Provenza, Villegas and Chamberlain all voted in favor.

The existence of that poison pill seemed to put the future of commercial cannabis cultivation in Yolo County in jeopardy in December when only Provenza and Villegas were willing to move forward with a tax. But following a workshop in January attended by many local growers, Saylor and Chamberlain announced their support.

Though Rexroad has largely supported the industry, he has said from the start he would not vote for a tax.

Villegas on Tuesday acknowledged the willingness of his colleagues, as well as the local industry, to find common ground in order to move forward.

“We were so far apart when we started and we’ve come a long way,” Villegas said. “Everybody has reasonably taken steps to find common ground.”

The board will vote on a final ordinance at its Feb. 6 meeting.