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Is the county rushing to bring in commercial cannabis regulations?

By Pippa Fisher



Map provided
within the city.

The county is seeking feedback from municipal councils and members of the public as it looks to prepare regulations around cannabis in the unincorporated areas of Contra Costa County.

County Supervisor Candace Andersen and Director of Conservation and Development John Kopchik gave a presentation of the county's preliminary framework, addressing commercial cannabis and outdoor personal use growth at the Feb. 26 Lafayette City Council meeting as part of the supervisors' efforts to receive feedback from towns and cities across the county.

Lafayette already has some of the most restrictive laws pertaining to cannabis in the area. Residents are allowed indoor growth of up to six plants for personal use, deliveries are allowed but only with electronic payment transactions, and no commercial activities are permitted

Currently the county also prohibits all commercial cannabis. The question of whether to allow commercial or outdoor personal use growth in unincorporated areas with different land-use permits, such as the Saranap area, that are adjacent to the city was being explored at the meeting.

Kopchik showed maps of the county illustrating buffer zones of 1,000 feet around sensitive sites (such as schools, parks/playgrounds, libraries, drug treatment centers and homeless shelters) and 500 feet around residential sites.

Kopchik explained that an unincorporated county cannabis tax initiative could be considered by voters at the next general election in November. Unincorporated voters would vote on the tax ballot and he added the intent is that the commercial cannabis ordinance would only take effect if and when voters pass a tax initiative.

Many speakers took their turns making it clear that they completely oppose any commercial cannabis activities, referring most often to the effect on teenagers as well as potential for increased crime and car accidents.

Alcohol Drug Abuse Prevention Team Director Jaime Rich urged the county to keep the ban. She said students she has worked with have reported kids having seizures in the classroom as a result of marijuana. Rich spoke specifically about the issue of delivery, the problems of keeping the drug out of the hands of those under 21 and suggested they look very closely at the language surrounding delivery laws. In Lafayette deliveries must go into a secured location.

Andersen and Kopchik were specifically seeking input on the buffer zones, caps on permits, outdoor personal growing and the council's overall reaction.

While council members Mike Anderson, Ivor Samson and Mark Mitchell approved of the plan in theory, Mayor Don Tatzin was a little more cautious saying he hopes the county would adopt the same rules as the adjacent cities. Anderson urged residents to make their voices heard at county meetings, reminding the audience that what they had heard that evening pertained only to unincorporated areas and not to the city of Lafayette.

Vice Mayor Cam Burks was absolutely clear in his message. He said he saw no need to hurry and that the county should come back to this in a year. "Why the rush? Why not wait to see the impacts on law and order?"

"I am completely opposed to moving forward," he said, to the audience's delight.

Supervisor Andersen will be presenting the framework to Moraga on March 14 and to Orinda on March 20 (this date is tentative).

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