

City staff to draft cannabis ordinance

Focus on starter stock

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By Sara Hayden

Half Moon Bay City Council members are nursing a new idea for cannabis regulation in their jurisdiction. After months of consideration and further hours at a Nov. 21 meeting, the council directed staff to draft an ordinance that focuses specifically on the cultivation of nursery starter stock, as opposed to mature cannabis plants. Permitting this license type would help local agriculturists whose traditional lines of business have declined while limiting public nuisances associated with the new crop, supporters said.

“(The) Class 4 (license type) allows our nurserymen and growers to get in and grow right now and see some value added,” Mayor Debbie Ruddock said. Proponents said nursery starts would eliminate some of the public’s primary concerns. They wouldn’t flower and produce smell, nor would they yield the psychoactive compounds a mature plant would.

“It is not, in any way that I can see, a social problem,” City Councilwoman Deborah Penrose said.

“I think that it pretty much solves most of the people’s objections that have come up,” Councilman Harvey Rarback agreed.

All present but Councilman Rick Kowalczyk supported the motion. He said the public needed more time. “I think you’re a step ahead of the community on this process and what they expect to have in Half Moon Bay. I think it’s a little premature,” Kowalczyk said.

A few members of the audience applauded in response. Although Proposition 64, which legalized the adult use of cannabis, was widely approved on the Coastsides, some here have requested time to examine the issue.

Kowalczyk proposed two other motions. One was to further study potential impacts of cannabis by hiring a consultant to assemble a white paper, conduct revenue and tax analysis, and lead a community survey. The motion unanimously carried. His second motion, to add commercial cannabis cultivation and retail sales as ballot measures in 2018 failed at the meeting, but the general sentiment was that the council would be willing to consider it in the future.

Past conversations considered permitting greenhouse cultivation and ancillary storage, testing, distribution and retail on lands designated for agricultural purposes—granted that mature cannabis wouldn’t displace existing crops and facilities met

setback requirements from sensitive communities. Since then, council members have said they're not in a hurry to pursue those activities.

"My impressions of that have changed over time as I've listened and done more research myself. I'm basically coming down on the 'go slow' approach. But it might not be as slow as you'd like," Ruddock said. She said the Type 4 nursery cultivation license could have a positive impact for the agricultural community. City staff will concentrate efforts accordingly.

"We really have to take a fresh start and look at it," Deputy City Manager Matthew Chidester said. "It's a new idea for us, so we need a little time to research what it means and to put together an ordinance."

Once the ordinance has been drafted, there will be a public hearing to get feedback. State law dictates that local jurisdictions must either have a ban or regulations in place by Jan. 1, 2018.