

# Board to reopen commercial cannabis issue

By Nick Baptista -- The Valley Springs News, Friday, January 18, 2019

A year after the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors adopted an ordinance to ban commercial cultivation and commerce of cannabis within the county's unincorporated areas, the new board has decided to revisit the issue.

The board on Tuesday discussed which issues they would like to talk about further in study sessions during 2019 and a majority of the supervisors voiced their wishes to reopen the commercial cultivation issue.

Supervisors Merita Callaway, Benjamin Stopper and Board Chairman Jack Garamendi were in favor of a study session in March on the cannabis question.

Supervisors Gary Tofanelli and Dennis Mills, who voted in favor of the ban back in January 2018, did not veto such a session, but thought there were other matters such as the General Plan update and mid-year budget review that need the board's attention in the first part of the year.

Callaway and Stopper are the new members on the board and proved to be the swing votes to resurrect the cannabis issue.

Callaway pushed for the commercial cannabis study session in March, shortly after the General Plan update process moves its way to the County Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors.

Callaway argued it would be unfair to commercial cannabis growers to let the matter "drag on." "Let's put a ribbon on this issue," she said.

The General Plan update has been in the works for more than a dozen years and has cost more than \$2 million to prepare.

County Planning Director Peter Maurer said the final Environmental Impact Report of the General Plan update is in its final review stages and should be going to the Planning Commission in February and before the Board of Supervisors in April or May.

Implementation of the General Plan update will also include county code, zoning ordinance and zoning map updates, Maurer added.

The projected General Plan update workload did not deter Callaway from calling for the March cannabis study session and she suggested hiring a cannabis project coordinator to relieve staff of the additional workload. Garamendi agreed with the idea. However, Stopper said whether to hire a cannabis project coordinator should be part of the discussion at the study session.

Quickly pushing the General Plan update toward approval would be a mistake, warned Tom Infusino of the Calaveras Planning Coalition.

"Rubber stamping the plan will not work," he said, and would open the road to litigation.