

Board plows ahead on bringing commercial pot back

By Nick Baptista / The Valley Springs News / Friday, February 22, 2019

A majority of Calaveras County supervisors favor working toward re-establishing commercial cannabis cultivation, but concede such regulations will not be finalized in time for this growing season.

The board held a lengthy study session Tuesday receiving input from staff and the public before discussing how to proceed. In the end, the board decided it needed another study session before a proposed regulation ordinance moves forward.

Date of the subsequent study session was not determined at Tuesday's meeting.

County Planning Director Peter Maurer posed a lengthy series of questions and issues the board needed to decide before a regulation ordinance can be drafted.

Maurer informed the board that the earliest they could expect to consider a proposed commercial cannabis ordinance would be in late July. The 30-day waiting period for enactment of such an ordinance would push the approval date into August and there is also a 60-day waiting period before any fees could take effect, all of which would be well after the growing season begins.

While Supervisors Merita Callaway, Jack Garamendi and Ben Stopper were in favor of directing staff to prepare a regulation ordinance for board consideration, Mills was in opposition and District 1 Supervisor Gary Tofanelli was absent.

Mills said the board was moving too quickly on the issue and urged his colleagues to have a social and economic study prepared before considering a new regulation ordinance.

"You can't put a bike trail in this county without a study," he said.

Mills, Tofanelli and Clyde Clapp last year voted to ban commercial cannabis production in the county, discontinuing a two-year-old urgency ordinance approved by a prior board allowing commercial cultivation.

Shortcomings of the 2016 urgency ordinance were outlined by staff at Tuesday's meeting along with their suggestions to improve the process.

To avoid another "Green Rush" of growers into the county and overburden on staff, Callaway, Garamendi and Stopper looked at limiting the program to about 200 growers who had been approved and were in compliance with the urgency ordinance.

To get an idea of what the interest would be, Garamendi suggested sending letters to those growers informing them it would not be until 2020 before new regulations could be established and asking whether they would still be interested in pursuing permits.