

New board fast tracks commercial pot study

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Updating the Calaveras County General Plan and a study session addressing emergency preparedness for the upcoming fire season will take a back seat to reconsider bringing back commercial cannabis production.

Last year's Board of Supervisors ended commercial cannabis production on a 3-2 vote after a two-year trial under an emergency ordinance passed by a previous board. By a 3-2 margin Tuesday, the board voted to move up a study session from March to February to reconsider allowing commercial cannabis production in the county.

November's election for District 5 supervisor proved to be the difference. First-term Supervisor Benjamin Stopper cast his vote with Board Chairman Jack Garamendi and Vice Chair Merita Callaway on Tuesday to fast track the commercial cannabis study session.

"I'd like to bring back an era," Supervisor Callaway said near the end of Tuesday's meeting asking for the board to be polled on moving up the commercial cannabis study session.

She was in favor of an earlier study session so the board can give direction to staff so an ordinance can be developed.

Callaway said she would support a pilot program with a limited number of growers including those who were registered under the emergency ordinance or who had submitted applications.

District 4 Supervisor Dennis Mills said fire preparedness and the General Plan update take priority in expressing his opposition to Callaway's proposal. District 1 Supervisor Gary Tofanelli also opposed the change in priorities.

A week earlier when the board was setting study session priorities, Callaway said it was important to tackle the commercial cannabis issue before the cannabis growing season begins.

Earlier in the meeting, the board voted 4-1 to refund \$940,043 in grower registration and renewal fees paid prior to the 2018 board voting for the ban. Mills was the dissenting vote. He asked for an audit before refunding any of the monies.

"This program itself is over and I don't want to continue it at all," Tofanelli said. He was not in favor of doing an audit. "I'd like to see it closed out and move on."