

## LOCAL NEWS

# Supervisors plan open meetings to help craft Ventura County marijuana ordinance



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Over the next few months, Ventura County officials will hold a series of meetings to get input on how best to regulate medical marijuana.

Among the goals of the eventual ordinance are to prevent youths from getting marijuana, reduce the black market for illegal growing and dealing, and ensure that those who legitimately need the drug can get it safely, officials said.

The county staff will use expert testimony, research and information from

the public to put together a series of recommendations for the Ventura County Board of Supervisors to consider in December.

Supervisors approved the process Tuesday on a 4-0 vote, with John Zaragoza absent.

The board agreed that holding stakeholder meetings, open to all, would be less time-consuming and cumbersome than creating a formal advisory group.

Having an advisory group would trigger Brown Act meeting-notice requirements and other processes, Supervisor Kathy Long said.

"I see an open-door inclusion" in the format, she said.

Tuesday's action came nearly two months after supervisors banned marijuana dispensaries, collectives and other commercial enterprises in unincorporated areas of the county. Individuals still can possess and grow it personally.

The county was among dozens of government bodies that banned practices related to medical marijuana in response to a change in state law that turns over licensing authority to the state in jurisdictions without regulations.

Several people at Tuesday's meeting urged supervisors to have an advisory committee made up of professionals and experts in the field.

"You're not going to write regulations with 50 people getting three minutes each," said Chelsea Sutula, industry committee chair for the Ventura County Cannabis Alliance.

Others urged supervisors to speed up the process.

"It's unrealistic to think everyone can grow their own," said Mari Scott, president of the Ventura County Cannabis Alliance, a medical marijuana advocacy group.

It also takes four months to grow, so people must spend money to go down to Los Angeles or find a street dealer, she said.

"Medical patients come first," Sutula said.

Ventura County Resource Management Agency Director Chris Stephens said the meetings won't be simply a free-for-all collection of opinions.

"We'll work with those from the industry, familiar with the industry," he said.

Experts will be brought in on all sides, Stephens said.

Sarah Armstrong, industry affairs director of the patient-advocacy group Americans for Safe Access, preferred the formation of a working group with stakeholders from all sides.

But she called supervisors' action a "historic first step" nonetheless.

"If it's not a perfect process, we'll work with them to fix it," Armstrong said.

Armstrong said in her experience working in Los Angeles, it was possible to keep the community from being inconvenienced, minimizing liabilities for the county and giving patients safe access.

Supervisor Linda Parks requested that representatives from cities be invited to the meetings. It would be ideal, she said, to have "one type of law that would impact everybody the same way."



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