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Last year, I, along with Supervisor Damon Connolly, was appointed to the Board of Supervisors sub-committee on Medical Cannabis. Following numerous public meetings, our Board, in December 2015, adopted an ordinance allowing the issuance of business licenses to up to four medical cannabis dispensaries in unincorporated areas of Marin (two along the 101 corridor and two in Central/West Marin).

The ordinance is intended to provide patients with safe access to medical cannabis, consistent with the voter-approved Compassionate Use Act of 1996 (which passed in Marin with 73% of the vote) and the state's Medical Cannabis Program which was signed into law by the Governor last fall. The ordinance provides the regulations and structure that have been lacking to allow medical cannabis dispensaries to operate and provide care in a safe manner.

We are concerned about operators who might currently be operating rogue "businesses". Our ordinance provides protections and safeguards so that cannabis does not end up in the hands of youth or those not holding a physician's recommendation.

By licensing potential operators through a competitive and thorough application process, we are seeking someone who uses best practices and brings community benefits to the table. The selection criteria, which we adopted at our May 3 Board of Supervisors meeting, is designed to minimize any potential negative impacts on the surrounding community while providing safe access to qualified patients seeking care.

Location will be an extremely important issue, and we have developed the criteria in such a way as to address community concerns. Although up to four dispensaries can be licensed under the program, there is certainly no requirement that we license four – and we anticipate that selection will ultimately come down to the combination of the right operator and the right location.

The application process is estimated to take four to eight months. Once an application is deemed complete, an internal staff review and an advisory committee, appointed by the County Administrator, will review the applications. The final decision will be made by the County Administrator. Should an applicant wish to appeal he/she may do so to our Board of Supervisors.

Applicants must submit a business plan, security plan, financial documentation and a site plan. Applicants will earn "bonus points" for a community benefits plan that addresses a variety of factors such as local Marin ownership, living wage compensation policies, a community relations program, implementation of an educational awareness program that explains the benefits and potential abuses of cannabis, reduced pricing for low income patients and veterans, and labelling and warning requirements.

Newly enacted comprehensive state legislation, the Medical Marijuana Safety and Regulation Act of 2016, protects local control by requiring all cannabis-related businesses to have a local permit, license or authorization as a precondition to obtaining a state license. The timing of our ordinance works extremely well with the passage of this law. Many ask what happens if voters approve recreational use of marijuana? Our licensed medical cannabis dispensaries will continue as separate licenses in order to address the needs of medically fragile patients, and we anticipate that there will continue to be a dual regulatory system even if cannabis is legalized recreationally in California.

I appreciate the tremendous amount of community input and interest in this process to date. This is likely a process that will change over time as the program is implemented, but we are confident that we have an effective starting point that will achieve the goals around safe access to medical cannabis that were envisioned by the voters twenty years ago.

Please join me at my next round of office hours on Thursday, June 2 from 10:00-11:30AM at the Margaret Todd Senior Center located at 1560 Hill Road in Novato. I invite you to stop by for a one-on-one meeting with me to discuss any County related ideas, suggestions or concerns. As your Supervisor, I value your input and believe it's important that I make myself available to hear from you. I also realize that many people have busy schedules and may have difficulty reaching me during regular business hours at the Civic Center in San Rafael. No appointment necessary – just stop on by!

As always, my door is open to you and I welcome your suggestions and ideas. You can reach me at: (415) 473-7331 or jarnold@marincounty.org.