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## Questionnaire to Candidates for Sonoma County District 4 Supervisor

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The Neighborhood Coalition, an all-volunteer grass roots citizens group, advocates for sustainable, environmentally sound, and neighborhood-compatible cannabis policies in Sonoma County in conjunction with education of the public about the health impacts of cannabis cultivation and use. We are asking each candidate for District 2 Supervisor to answer the following five questions which we will post on our website in their entirety to inform voters. Please respond, preferably in Word, by April 2, 2026 to [SonomaNeighborhoodCoalition@gmail.com](mailto:SonomaNeighborhoodCoalition@gmail.com)

The Supervisors approved a contentious update to the Cannabis Land Use Ordinance in late-2025, which goes into effect on July 1, 2026. While communities were promised improved neighborhood compatibility, this was largely not accomplished. Many of the controversial provisions of the revised Cannabis Ordinance were approved by 3-2 votes. Supervisor James Gore's family has deep financial connections to the cannabis industry, and he voted consistently to support the cannabis industry and to harm neighborhoods. There will be a new Supervisor for District 4 who might be willing to reconsider and correct these decisions. Supervisor David Rabbitt consistently voted to protect neighborhoods.

### **1. Do you support requiring the same minimum 1,000-foot setbacks between cannabis cultivation sites and neighboring property regardless of zoning so that all children and families have the same minimal protections?**

Cannabis cultivation emissions (odors) cause respiratory illness and have significant amounts of beta-myrcene, a terpene recognized as carcinogenic by the [federal National Toxicology Program](#) (an inter-agency program run by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), California's [Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment](#), and Proposition 65. The recently revised Cannabis Land Use Ordinance requires setbacks of only 100 feet from property lines and 500 feet from homes and crops on Ag/RRD-zoned land but 1,000 feet from the property line on RR/AR-zoned land and from schools. There is no scientific explanation for these discrepancies. Children and farm workers are especially disadvantaged by short setbacks. Even 1,000 feet may not fully protect as quantitative studies have shown that carcinogenic compounds travel well over 1,000 feet.

*While I am sympathetic to the realities of odor and other potentially detrimental impacts related to cannabis cultivation, and think those considerations are important when determining setbacks, I think applying a 1,000 foot setback between all properties regardless of zoning designation goes a bit too far. There are circumstances where 1,000 foot setbacks sense – near schools, residences, childcare and healthcare facilities – but I can also imagine circumstances where cannabis may be grown in a more commercial-industrial area with no residences or medical/childcare facilities nearby, in which case, a 1,000 foot setback may not make as much sense.*

**2. Do you support allowing neighborhoods to request designation as exclusion zones where cannabis cannot be commercially grown, processed, or sold?**

An exclusion zone is a zoning code designation where cannabis cannot be commercially grown, processed, or sold. Permit Sonoma conducted a [countywide cannabis survey](#) in 2021 and found that 74% of County residents approve of exclusion zones (question 9). Three supervisors, including Supervisor Gore, refused to include a mechanism in the Cannabis Ordinance that would allow neighborhoods to request designation as exclusion zones.

*I am interested in learning more about this possibility, but am not familiar with exclusion zones being implemented anywhere in Sonoma County; that said, I want to learn more about this issue to understand the pros and cons of considering a policy like this in the future.*

**3. Would you support rescinding the ministerial crop swap program?**

The revised Cannabis Ordinance includes a ministerial “crop swap” program. It allows no public input about environmental harms including odor, traffic, noise, water use, and cumulative impacts. The California Department of Fish and Game objected to this provision because it does not protect water resources and endangered wildlife in streams and wetlands.

*I am open to this possibility, particularly because of the additional impacts cannabis may have compared to other crops, such as apples or winegrapes, which produce no odors and generally use less water than cannabis.*

**4. Would you support removing cannabis from the County’s Right to Farm Ordinance?**

The California Right to Farm Act protects commercial agricultural operations from being deemed a nuisance. Sonoma County also has a Right to Farm Ordinance. Over the overwhelming objections of rural residents, the Sonoma County Farm Bureau, and the Planning Commission, three supervisors voted to include cannabis under the County’s Right to Farm Ordinance. This violates § 30-25 of the ordinance, which requires an operation to comply with “all applicable federal, state, and county statutes, ordinances, rules, regulations, approvals, and permits.” Cannabis remains illegal under federal law so § 30-25 is violated. The inclusion also violates the State Right to Farm Act, which not only excludes cannabis but also requires an activity to have been operating for more than three years and not have been a nuisance when it began. Including cannabis also violates State nuisance law (as even acknowledged by County Counsel) and the State Health and Safety Code.

*I am open to this possibility, but, as a supporter of the framework of the Right to Farm Ordinance, including the support and endorsement from the Sonoma County Farm Bureau, I would want to listen to their perspective on why cannabis is included in the Right to Farm Ordinance, and whether there have been successes or shortcomings since this was added that may warrant removing cannabis from the County's Right to Farm Ordinance in the future.*

**5. Do you think general funds from property and sales taxes should subsidize the cannabis industry, given the many pressing needs in Sonoma County? If you support subsidizing the cannabis industry, please explain why.**

Voters approved Measure A (Cannabis Business Tax) in 2017 with a rate structure that projected a revenue windfall “to fund essential county services” including “public safety, fire, health, housing, roads, and environmental protection.” Beginning in 2022 and continuing each year through 2025, the supervisors have repeatedly cut cannabis business taxes in response to drastically reduced crop value caused by oversupply in California. The [County consultant's report in 2022](#) concluded outdoor cultivation was not sustainable. It stated (p. 4) that outdoor cultivation had struggled to find a place in the cannabis market, noting, “Many outdoor cultivators have been unable to sell their product at all.” The May 2025 Cannabis Business Tax Staff Report confirmed the failure of the cannabis businesses and concluded the new tax structure would not generate sufficient revenue to pay for the cannabis program . Moreover, it would soon require general funds be tapped to make up the shortfall.

*No, but I know that there were high hopes when Measure A was passed that legal cannabis cultivation would be a silver bullet that was supposed to generate significant tax revenue, while at the same time, undermining the black market while bringing growers into a structured, regulated environment. Despite many cultivators seeking a pathway to legally cultivate cannabis, black market cultivation continues to thrive, and legal cannabis continues to struggle by comparison. As I reconcile the stark differences between what was hoped for and what actually came to be, I feel that the county must adapt to these changing circumstances. If the county doesn't, I think it only raises the likelihood that legal cultivators will go out of business, only furthering the prosperity of black market grows, some of which take place in homes, open space areas, and other sensitive land uses, often time with no oversight on water use, pesticide use, and other environmental impacts. To encourage a structured environment to continue to legally grow cannabis, I think that policy adaptation is important, including amending the fee structure to help with cost recovery but also keep legal cannabis businesses viable. It's not a great outcome, but to me, I feel we need to work with the industry, which is already taxed at a higher rate than any other agricultural commodity in Sonoma County.*