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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 4 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 March 31, 2026 to 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 harm neighborhoods. The new Supervisor for District 4 has an opportunity to reconsider and correct these decisions.

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.

No. I believe that 1,000+ foot setbacks are appropriate for certain zoning designations, such as residential areas, schools, daycare centers, healthcare services, and assisted living facilities to name a few, but believe that a 1,000 foot setback on all parcels, regardless of zoning designation in the county, is too broad and could create unintended consequences for cultivators on agriculturally or industrially zoned lands and other areas where impacts may be far fewer than lands zoned for residential, child-serving, or other uses where there is a more significant and direct effect that warrants a larger setback.

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 would want to understand how such an exclusion zone process would play out before opining on this issue. Conceptually, I like the opportunity for those impacted to have an opportunity to have a voice and stake in the future of their neighborhood, but without understanding the mechanics of how such exclusion zones would be implemented, I am hesitant to weigh in on this particular issue without understanding how this would work in practice.

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 would be open to doing so as it relates to cannabis specifically, as I believe that replacing row crops, such as winegrapes, with a more resource-intensive crop such as cannabis, should have some discretionary review, including, at a minimum, an opportunity for public comment for those impacted, given such crop swaps could use more water, create odors, and have other impacts that previous crops part of the swap may not.

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 a strong supporter of the Right to Farm Ordinance, and have also been endorsed by the Sonoma County Farm Bureau. While I have an open mind on revisiting this issue as it pertains to cannabis in particular, I would want to have a conversation with agricultural stakeholders to understand how cannabis made its way into the Right to Farm Ordinance to begin with, how community impacts factored into that conversation, and how successes or shortcomings have played out to inform future amendments.

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.

Not necessarily, though I believe that when revenue projections were considered at the time Measure A was crafted shortly after cannabis legalization was passed by voters, it was based on an understanding that legal cultivation would thrive, and undercut black market cultivators, which never materialized as intended, and caused lower revenue, and thereby, fewer resources to the county to cover expenditures related to the cannabis program. While I don’t necessarily like the idea of “subsidizing” the industry, I also don’t think it’s practical to encourage additional black market cultivation at the expense of those seeking to cultivate in a legal manner that’s above board, so I believe that adapting to the reality before us, by revisiting the fees and taxes that cultivators pay, is prudent, and creates a pathway for survival amongst legal cannabis cultivators. Big picture, I would rather see cultivators pursue legal pathways to grow cannabis, instead of looking at a highly taxed industry and choosing to continue cultivating on the black market, which only harms our community as illegal cultivation sites may lack consideration on water use and sources, odor, and other potential impacts that harm neighbors and community members.