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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

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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?**

Response: I supported legalization of cannabis cultivation here in Sonoma County – failed attempts by law enforcement for decades to control and block related ventures wasn't working. I am not a consumer of cannabis products but was once given a medicinal brownie from a physician at UCSF sealed in a wrapper as an attempt to address serious sleep deprivation issues. No one told me not to eat the whole thing in one sitting – it sure went down easy with an extra-large glass of milk!!

As a result, I didn't sleep for days. Yes, I have to laugh at myself for what happened as it proved to be a failed experiment.

I live in rural Petaluma and have a large family ranch where I farm organic hay silage for dairy cows. Not too far from me is a commercial grow. One of the existing neighbors to that grow was disgusted with the messy operation and the odor proved to be intolerable. She sold her house and moved away. I had been invited to a grow that had installed charcoal filters in the greenhouses – it was extremely effective and I'm now an advocate that all grows be allowed to do the same to contain the odors, and not be offensive to neighboring property residents and children. I also believe the grow buildings should be better built so that investing in filters is a long term and permanent feature of the facility.

Yes I support the setbacks because of the odor grows generate without filtering and the visual unattractiveness of messy operations and when elected look forward to making the necessary changes in the ordinance so that both neighboring properties and the growers have a win – win situation. There are many facets to this issue including impacts on water and look forward to the challenge.

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.

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.

Response: Yes I support exclusion zones and as I previously noted charcoal filtration or more effective filtration for grow operations may become mandatory. Its part of the cost of doing business and reducing neighborhood resentment and unnecessary legal challenges. Clearly the grow ordinances have not been well thought out and I don't blame neighbors for being angry. I would like help effect major changes to address this issue.

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.

Response: Yes I would give serious consideration to rescinding the program, as someone who worked on the County General Plan Update for 5.5 years I think its unacceptable to block public input. How is that possible? I am the only person to file and win a lawsuit against a major city for over-pumping the groundwater basin so much so the valley floor has dropped close to 4 feet much of which will never be able to recover if additional water was put back into the basin. I was a guest speaker at the Governor's office in 2005 – our County Supervisors who have police power over groundwater resources has intentionally ignored implementing groundwater management plans that were originally offered with help and some funding by the State DWR in 1999. Grows should not be allowed in sensitive groundwater resource areas. We do not want to end up with adjudicated water rights overseen by the Courts.

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.

Response: Yes I would vote to remove cannabis from the Right to Farm Act.

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.

Response: I do not support subsidizing cannabis in any form. I learned recently that grant money was handed out to growers including one who had not paid their property taxes. Absurd!

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.

Final Comments:

About 4 years ago I was approached by many growers to lease 6 acres of land and use a large barn on my property.

The contract handed to me provided for annual lease payments for 9 months of operations each year for a total of \$1.62 million paid in cash. After much consideration I said no and turned down the offer. As I shared in an earlier statement, I sued a city over groundwater depletion because regional Sonoma County Groundwater supplies are now in an overdraft state with salt water intrusion in the Petaluma Basin and Sonoma Valley Basin. I won that lawsuit forcing Rohnert Park to cutback on their pumping from 42 wells, and get more water from wells located at the Russian River. I also took into consideration my neighbors who would get the smell everyday with help from prevailing winds blowing East.

The growers were not responsive to my request to use filtration of air before being exhausted outside. Based on their unwillingness to be a good farmer and the uncertainty of have sustainable groundwater supplies for me and my neighbors I turned down the contracts and have no regrets. I still work two jobs both farming and construction and have no regrets for passing up the grow operation on my property.

Respectfully,

John E. King