



County of Sonoma

State of California

Date: October 28, 2025

Item Number: _____

Resolution Number: _____

☐ 4/5 Vote Required

**Resolution Of The Board Of Supervisors Of The County Of Sonoma, State Of California,
Approving as Part of the Cannabis Program Update an Amendment to the General Plan
Agricultural Resources Element and Amendments to the Sonoma County Uniform Rules for
Agricultural Preserves and Farmland Security Zones**

Whereas, in October 2015, the state enacted the Medical Cannabis Regulation and Safety Act (Medical Cannabis Act) to provide a regulatory framework for medical cannabis businesses. On November 8, 2016, the voters of California passed the Adult Use of Marijuana Act (Adult Use Cannabis Act). On June 27, 2017, the state passed Senate Bill 94 which consolidated regulations into the Medicinal and Adult-Use Cannabis Regulation and safety Act (Cannabis Act) (California Business and Professions Code 26000 et seq.), which, in addition to other amendments, provides the current state regulatory structure for cannabis businesses; and

Whereas, in 2006 the County began permitting medical cannabis dispensaries. On December 20, 2016, a Negative Declaration and Ordinance No. 6189 were adopted establishing the County's first comprehensive Cannabis Land Use Ordinance codified in Sonoma County Code Chapter 26 (Zoning Code) Section 26-88-250 through 258, establishing permit requirements and standards for cultivation and supply chain uses. At that time the General Plan was not amended and cannabis was considered a nonagricultural commercial use and designated as an agricultural product distinct from other agricultural crops. On October 16, 2018, the Board of Supervisors adopted Ordinance No. 6245 amending Chapter 26 to allow adult use cannabis in Sonoma County for the full cannabis supply chain, enhance neighborhood

compatibility by increasing minimum parcel size to 10 acres for cultivation in agricultural and resource zones, and to add new definitions to harmonize with state law where appropriate; and

Whereas, on March 15, 2022, the Board of Supervisors adopted a Resolution of Intent (Resolution 22-0088) and the Cannabis Program Update Framework, to direct and guide Permit Sonoma's work in the preparation of a General Plan Amendment, Ordinance, and a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report to amend the Cannabis Land Use Ordinance and related regulations ("Cannabis Program Update" or "Project");

Whereas, in 1989 the Agricultural Resources Element was added to the Sonoma County General Plan acknowledging the County's robust and diverse agricultural sector and in support of its economic prosperity as a benefit to the County; and

Whereas, the General Plan Agricultural Resources Element implements policies and programs to protect and enhance agricultural lands and the agricultural sector and the unique character of unincorporated communities and areas while allowing for visitor serving uses that support the agricultural industry and which are secondary and incidental to agricultural production; and

Whereas, the County has a long history of promoting and supporting new and varied types of agricultural production including dairies, fruit and vegetable crops, nurseries, hops, orchards, vineyards, and hemp. Cannabis cultivation is analogous to other plant agriculture in the County in that it involves the growing, harvesting, and preparation of plants for commercial purposes and allowing and supporting cannabis as a new agricultural crop is consistent with County history and policy;

Whereas, opportunities in the County of Sonoma for commercial cannabis businesses are important to promote the agricultural diversity of the county and support a robust and sustainable local economy and reclassifying cannabis as an agricultural use under the General Plan is appropriate given the current definition of agriculture, which involves the production of food, fiber, and plant material, and is essential to integrating this new crop into the agricultural landscape of the County; and

Whereas, establishing General Plan policies that are specific to cannabis and recognize its unique and evolving status are important to guiding land use policy that ensures cannabis uses are compatible with existing uses, encourages market participation and disincentives participation in the illicit market, and provides diverse business opportunities while minimizing impacts on the environment and residents; and

Whereas, the California Legislature enacted the California Land Conservation Act of 1965, also known as the Williamson Act (Government Code § 51200 et seq.), which authorizes counties to establish agricultural preserves and to enter into voluntary contracts with the owners of qualifying land within the preserves to restrict the use of land to agricultural uses, open space uses, and uses compatible with agricultural or open spaces uses, in exchange for property tax savings; and

Whereas, the intent of the Land Conservation Act is to preserve a maximum amount of the limited supply of agricultural land to conserve the state's economic resources, to discourage premature and unnecessary conversion of agricultural land to urban uses, and to preserve agricultural production as an important physical, social, aesthetic, and economic asset; and

Whereas, pursuant to the California Land Conservation Act, Government Code Section §51231, the Board of Supervisors shall adopt uniform rules to govern the administration of the County's agricultural preserve program; and

Whereas, the Board of Supervisors, after making certain findings under Government Code §51238.1, may list in its Uniform Rules certain uses of contracted land as uses that are compatible with the agricultural use for contracted lands; and

Whereas, on December 13, 2011, by Resolution Number 11-0678, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors adopted Uniform Rules for Agricultural Preserves and Farmland Security Zones ("Uniform Rules") to govern local administration of the County's agricultural preserve program; and

Whereas, in addition to other amendments, the Uniform Rules were amended on December 20, 2016 by Resolution No. 16-0485 to designate cannabis as a compatible use; and

Whereas, in consideration of the need to balance the evolving agricultural industry of the County, the Board of Supervisors presently desires to amend the Uniform Rules to include cannabis cultivation as an allowed or qualifying “agricultural use” of land restricted by a Land Conservation Contract consistent with the General Plan Amendment and Project; and

Whereas, defining cannabis as an agricultural use on contracted lands is an essential component of integrating cannabis into the County’s robust and diverse agricultural sector and is consistent with the Land Conservation Act’s definitions of agricultural use and agricultural commodity, which together mean the use of land for purposes of producing any all plant and animal products for commercial purposes; and

Whereas, the Board of Supervisors further desires to amend the compatible uses of the Uniform Rules to include centralized cannabis processing and cannabis manufacturing, similar to compatible uses that support other types of agricultural uses; and

Whereas, on July 28, 2025, the Airport Land Use Commission held a duly noticed public hearing to review the proposed General Plan Amendment and draft Ordinance and determined that the proposed amendment to the General Plan and draft Ordinance are consistent with the Comprehensive Airport Land Use Plan (CALUP) because implementation of the project would not affect open space retention, affect protected airspace, increase noise exposure beyond existing levels, or exceed population density thresholds or development standards of the CALUP; and

Whereas, in accordance with the applicable provisions of law, the Planning Commission held duly noticed public hearings on June 19, August 7, and September 17, 2025 at which time the Planning Commission heard and received all relevant testimony and evidence presented orally or in writing regarding the Project and all interested persons were given an opportunity to hear and be heard and continued deliberations to a date and time certain on September 18, 2025, after which the Planning Commission adopted Resolution No. 25-10 recommending the Board of Supervisors, (a) certify a Final Environmental Impact Report for the Comprehensive Cannabis Program Update, and adopt findings of fact pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and a statement of overriding considerations, (b) adopt General Plan

Amendments to the policies of the Agricultural Resources Element, and (c) approve the zoning ordinance, with amendments.

Whereas, on October 28, 2025, the Board of Supervisors conducted a duly noticed public hearing at which time the Board of Supervisors were presented with the full record of the proceedings and heard and received all relevant testimony and evidence presented orally or in writing regarding the Project. All interested persons were given an opportunity to hear and be heard regarding the Project; and

Whereas, the Project has been environmentally reviewed pursuant to the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code Sections 21000, et seq. ("CEQA") and incompliance with the State CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 15000, et seq.), and the County's Local CEQA Guidelines (Sonoma County Code Chapter 23A). A Final Environmental Impact Report was prepared and the Board of Supervisors, by separate Resolution No. _____, certified the Final Environmental Impact Report, made appropriate environmental findings of fact, adopted a Statement of Overriding Considerations, and adopted a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the Project. Resolution No. _____ is incorporated herein by reference.

Now, Therefore, Be It Resolved, that the Board of Supervisors makes the following findings, based on substantial evidence in the record:

1. The foregoing recitals are true and correct and incorporated into the findings herein.
2. General Plan Consistency
 - A. The Project will not create any internal inconsistency in the General Plan, as proposed to be amended, or inhibit the implementation of any other General Plan policies or program, as detailed further below.
 - B. The General Plan Agricultural Resources Element establishes goals, policies, and implementation measures aimed at supporting the agricultural sector in Sonoma County, as a diverse agricultural industry is fundamental to the County's economic

prosperity.

- C. The General Plan establishes that agricultural production is the primary use of designated agricultural land, and defines agricultural production activities as activities directly associated with agricultural production, excluding agricultural support services, processing which changes an agricultural product from its natural state to a different form (e.g., grapes to wine), or visitor serving activities. Ancillary processing of cannabis grown onsite is considered an agricultural production activity under the General Plan because it does not change the agricultural product from its natural state to a different form and it directly supports onsite agricultural production.
- i. General Plan Policy AR-4a establishes agricultural production as the highest priority use on agricultural lands, and further states that residential uses in these areas must recognize that agricultural nuisance situations can occur (such as odors). Additionally, General Plan Policy AR-4c recommends establishing buffers between agricultural uses and the residential interface. General Plan Policy AR-4h similarly provides a mechanism for the separation of cannabis production on agricultural lands from existing residential areas. This policy supports adoption and implementation of cannabis-specific setbacks and other restrictions not applied to other crops, while maintaining consistency with overall General Plan goals to encourage and prioritize agricultural uses on agricultural lands.
 - ii. Agricultural production in Sonoma County has traditionally been composed primarily of outdoor operations. Compared to these operations, cannabis cultivation is more likely to occur within fully enclosed permanent structures utilizing artificial or supplemental lighting and imported growth media, a cultivation method that does not utilize the native soil or the sun. When located on agricultural lands, such structures result in a loss of agricultural soil. In addition, year-round cultivation within structures involves continual activity throughout the year, unlike most traditional agricultural production,

resulting in many of the same physical impacts as agricultural processing and agricultural support uses. Policy AR-4g limits the size of permanent structures used for cannabis production to be subordinate to outdoor onsite agricultural production of any type. Additionally, this policy ensures that cannabis production on agricultural land would not be entirely encumbered by large permanent structures, further protecting agricultural soils, including Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance. This policy acknowledges the trend towards cannabis cultivation in large structures often seen in other California jurisdictions and is similar to Policies AR-5e and AR-5f, which limit structural development for agricultural support uses, and therefore aligns with the goals of the Agricultural Resources Element of the General Plan.

- D. General Plan goals and policies support agricultural support uses such as processing, when they are incidental to agricultural production. The General Plan definition for agricultural support services includes processing services which support agricultural production, and policies provide for agricultural processing uses where such uses support and are proportional to agricultural production onsite or in the local area. Although cannabis centralized processing (i.e., processing of cannabis grown offsite), does not change cannabis from its natural state to a different form, it is a service provided to support agricultural production in the local area. Therefore, cannabis centralized processing appropriately classified as an agricultural support service under the General Plan and is important to supporting the needs of local cannabis production. Cannabis centralized processing is subject to and must comply with General Plan Policies AR-5e and AR-5f, which limit structural development for agricultural support uses to those that are subordinate to onsite agricultural production and do not adversely affect agricultural production in the area.
- E. The Agricultural Resources Element of the General Plan acknowledges the benefits of visitor serving uses to the agricultural industry, as it promotes the sale of agricultural products and allows agricultural uses to diversify and sustain long term

agricultural production. Goal AR-6 allows for new visitor serving uses, so long as the visitor serving use is limited in scale and location, provides a benefit to the agricultural industry, and is compatible with the long-term agricultural use of the land. Agricultural tourism directly promotes the sale of agricultural products. Policy AR-6i, applies the Goal to cannabis uses by allowing cannabis sales and consumption in conjunction with limited cannabis visitor serving activities and cannabis events. The limitations on visitor serving uses, specifically not allowing open tasting rooms, is to balance the need for the cannabis industry to benefit from educational and agricultural promotional activities, while ensuring visitor serving uses are controlled to allow for consideration of appropriate modes of visitor transportation and methods to control consumption amounts. This policy also allows for all other (non-consumption) visitor serving uses to apply to cannabis, including sales, promotion, educational activities, and tours, similar to traditional agriculture.

- F. While the Agricultural Resource Element recognizes the importance of food production, including aquaculture and fishing, and the role of farms and ranches in the local food economy through Policy AR-1e, the General Plan's goals and policies are not limited to supporting and promoting food production. The Agricultural Resources Element has long been applied to promote non-food agricultural production including hops for beer, apples for cider, hemp, and winegrapes, the latter of which is more prevalent in the County than all other agriculture combined. Classifying cannabis as an agricultural use is consistent with the goals and policies of the General Plan, which support all forms of agricultural production, and also furthers policies that support food production by allowing farmers to diversify and support existing farm incomes.
- G. Proposed General Plan policies are consistent with the Agricultural Resources Element of the General Plan as they are intended to mimic similar policies governing traditional agricultural uses while also allowing the cannabis industry to integrate into the County's diverse agricultural sector over time.

3. Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act)

- A. The inclusion of cannabis cultivation and accessory uses as agricultural uses and cannabis centralized processing, and cannabis manufacturing as compatible uses will not significantly compromise the long-term productive agricultural capability of contracted lands in agricultural preserves in Sonoma County because the current requirement that contracted land must be devoted to agricultural use will remain unchanged. The amendments will support productive agricultural capacity by including a new form of plant agriculture, which will further support other agricultural uses because it is unlikely that cannabis would be the sole qualifying agricultural use on the property due to development standards placed on the crop. The inclusion of cannabis centralized processing and cannabis manufacturing as compatible uses also supports long-term productive agricultural capability because these uses directly support agricultural cannabis uses onsite and in the local area.
- B. The amendments will not result in the significant removal of adjacent contracted lands from open space uses because the amendments facilitate agricultural uses and compatible uses that directly support agricultural cannabis production and would not impact adjacent open space uses. Further, the amendments do not change the type of quantity of compatible uses on open space lands though the limited agriculture allowed could include cannabis cultivation.
- C. The amendments will not result in an increase in the density of the permanent or temporary human population of the agricultural area because the agricultural use, accessory agricultural uses, and compatible uses are not residential uses, the uses are not expected to result in the extension of urban services or infrastructure to agricultural areas, and because the uses are limited to cultivation of cannabis and its necessary accessory and compatible uses which directly support the production onsite and in the local area, consistent with similar agricultural accessory uses and compatible uses for other agricultural uses listed as compatible in the Uniform Rules and is therefore not expected to

increase the density of the human population of the area beyond what is expected for agricultural operations and limited visitor serving uses associated with the onsite agricultural production.

Be It Further Resolved, that the Board of Supervisors hereby approves an Amendment to the General Plan Agricultural and Resources Element adopting the changes set forth in Exhibit 2-A.

Be It Further Resolved, that the Board of Supervisors amends the Sonoma County Uniform Rules for Agricultural Preserves and Farmland Security Zones to read as attached in Exhibit 2-B.

Be It Further Resolved, that the Board of Supervisors hereby direct the Permit and Resource Management Department (Permit Sonoma) to submit this amendment to Sonoma County's Uniform Rules for Agricultural Preserves and Farmland Security Zones to the Department of Conversation; and

Be It Further Resolved, that the Board of Supervisors designates the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors as the custodian of the documents and other material which constitute the record of proceedings upon which the decision herein is based. These documents may be found at the office of the Clerk of the Board at 575 Administration Drive, Room 102 A, Santa Rosa, CA 95403 and the Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department, 2500 Ventura Avenue, Santa Rosa, CA 95403.

Supervisors:

Hermosillo: Rabbitt: Coursey: Gore: Hopkins:

Ayes: Noes: Absent: Abstain:

So Ordered.