



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT  
PLANNING COMMISSION

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August 11, 2022

Humboldt County Board of Supervisors  
825 5th Street, Room 111  
Eureka, CA 95501

Subject: Water storage requirements relevant to Cannabis Permitting

Dear Chair Bass and members of the Board of Supervisors:

The Planning Commission continues to review and act on a significant number of cannabis permit applications. Due to Humboldt County experiencing extreme drought conditions, there continues to be substantial public concern expressed over the use of groundwater for cannabis irrigation needs. As the Planning Commission, we have been addressing these concerns through careful conditioning of projects.

One condition that we have required most consistently is rainwater catchment and storage. However, while our Commission has been requiring water storage as fairly as possible, we would like to improve our recommendations such that the amount of water storage requested is conditioned as a percentage, rather than case-by-case. As an example, not every project is pulled from the consent calendar, and as such, do not receive any additional recommended conditions regarding water storage. Additionally, the percentage of water catchment requested as a recommended condition of approval has varied, with a range of 20-50 %. The minimum of 20% was selected both because it represents the minimal percentage historically recommended, and it allows for data to be collected and analyzed that would better inform a best practices recommendation regarding water catchment requirements.

We are seeking your input and thoughts on our request to have the Planning and Building Department condition permits to require rainwater catchment that represents 20% or more of projected annual water usage.

Currently, whenever a cannabis operation proposes to utilize a well, the Planning Department has been requesting a report from a licensed geologist or hydrogeologist that demonstrates that the well is a groundwater well without a hydraulic connection to adjacent wells or surface water features. This requirement has helped, but the public remains concerned about the continued use of groundwater for cannabis irrigation and the overall impact to the County's groundwater resources, specifically, that there is evidence that groundwater depletion in some areas may be affecting the habitat of other organisms, and that neighbors of applicants report their wells going dry despite previous hydrology/geology reports of dis-connectivity. To address these concerns, our Commission has recently voted (with one dissenting vote) to require the following condition that a minimum of twenty percent of the total annual irrigation needs will be collected as rainwater catchment and storage:

*Within one year of project approval the applicant shall provide a plan for review and approval by the Planning and Building Department to implement a rainwater catchment system capable of providing 20% of the total water required for cultivation. Within two years of project approval the rainwater catchment system must be operational and provide at least 20% of the irrigation water.*

We request your Board provide feedback to either modify the ordinance or to establish policy to require rainwater catchment, water storage, or reliance on Drought Task Force through existing ordinance, in addition to groundwater wells. Thank you.

Sincerely,

  
Alan Bongio, Chair  
Humboldt County Planning Commission  
On Behalf of the Planning Commission.