

**Discussion Paper**  
**KEY ISSUES AND POLICY OPTIONS**

**CANNABIS NURSERIES**

**BACKGROUND**

Cannabis nurseries are a type of commercial cultivation. The following policy options provide a range of permit thresholds for the permitting of cannabis nurseries within agricultural, resource, and industrial zones. A Cannabis nursery is defined in the Ordinance as: *“a licensee that produces only clones, immature plants, seeds, and other agricultural products for wholesale sale, used specifically for the planting, propagation, and cultivation of medical cannabis.”*

**Policy Options:**

The following range of policy options are related to the where cannabis nurseries should be allowed.

- A. **Allow in Multiple Zones Including Agricultural, Resource, and Industrial Zones.** This option would allow more opportunity for nurseries in multiple zoning districts.
- B. **Allow in Agricultural Zones only.** This option would limit nurseries to agricultural zones only, reducing the potential sites available.
- C. **Allow in Industrial Zones only.** This option would limit nurseries to industrial zones only, reducing the potential sites available.

**Analysis**

Cannabis nurseries are predominantly indoors but may have some outdoor cultivation components. Option A would provide the best opportunity to site both indoor and outdoor nurseries in multiple zoning districts. Option B would limit nurseries to agricultural areas where there are currently other types of nurseries that may want to diversify into cannabis. Option C would limit nurseries to industrial zones, thereby limiting nurseries to being indoor only. Security is not as much a concern for nursery stock as the plant values are low in comparison to cultivation sites. However, the size of the structures and lot coverage may be a concern, particularly in the agricultural and resource zones. The proposed maximum canopy size that a single entity can cultivate is one acre within Sonoma County.

**Staff Recommendation: Option A.** The proposed Ordinance includes the allowance of nurseries, both indoor and outdoor, within agricultural, resource, and industrial zones. This will provide more opportunity for the siting of new nurseries and will allow existing nurseries to diversify into cannabis.

**5. Cannabis Nursery Permit Requirements**

The following options are presented for consideration of the permit type required for cannabis nurseries.

- A. **Allow with a Conditional Use Permit.** This option would permit some types and sizes of cultivation with a conditional use permit, which would require a public hearing for all cannabis uses and no ministerial permitting.
- B. **Allow with a Minor Use Permit.** This option would allow a minor use permit instead of a conditional use permit for cannabis nurseries. This provides for public notification, possible hearing waiver, and is usually exempt from environmental review or has no significant impacts. Minor use permits are often used for minor expansion of existing uses and are generally approved administratively by staff.

- C. **Allow with a Zoning Permit.** This option would allow a ministerial zoning permit (by right) for nurseries subject only to the standards. No notification or public hearing is required and no additional conditions to address site specific concerns can be added.

### **Analysis**

Cannabis nurseries are allowed only for wholesale distribution. Retail distribution of cannabis clones and starter plants is proposed to be allowed only through a cannabis dispensary. This will reduce the traffic associated with cannabis nurseries. Option A would require a conditional use permit which would allow more review of nurseries on a case by case basis. Option B would require a lesser amount of review with a Minor Use Permit, and Option C would require a ministerial zoning permit. A cannabis nursery may be similar to other types of nurseries currently permitted but there are also many other unknown aspects that may be difficult to address with a ministerial zoning permit. Lot coverage, visual aesthetics, and traffic are some primary concerns, along with energy use, water supplies and wastewater discharges, which could best be addressed through the use permit process.

**Staff Recommendation: Option A.** The proposed Ordinance would allow wholesale cannabis nurseries, with a conditional use permit, in agricultural, resource, and industrial zones. Indoor cannabis nurseries would also be allowed in the Industrial zones. This would allow staff to review nurseries on a case by case basis. After staff is more familiar with this type of use and the potential impacts a more permissive approach could be considered during Phase II.

### **6. Cannabis Nurseries Standards**

The proposed Ordinance includes a list of required standards to minimize impacts. The following standard provides a policy consideration for the Commission.

- A. **Existing Structures Limitation.** The proposed Ordinance includes a restriction to existing structures for indoor/greenhouse nurseries for the Land Intensive Agricultural (LIA) Zone.

### **Analysis**

The restriction to existing structures would be consistent with how indoor and mixed light cultivation operations are proposed within the LIA zone. This protects agricultural land while still allowing existing nurseries to include cannabis.

**Staff Recommendation: Option A.** Staff recommends limiting cultivation to existing indoor or greenhouse structures within the LIA zone, consistent with cultivation standards.