

Dear Chair Haschak and Members of the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors;

The Willits Environmental Center supports the opening of Phase 3 on July 1, 2020. We oppose the proposed MND addendum and Ordinance amendment to postpone opening Phase 3.

Proposing to postpone the opening of Phase 3 for almost a year, rather than proceeding with the long established Phase 3 opening date of July 1, 2020, has implications that are potentially controversial and consequential. Therefore, we do not think it is in keeping with the Board's intention of delaying non-COVID-19, non-essential controversial issues until the public is able to participate in discussions readily and reliably.

In addition, the Phase 3 applicants are the farmers and business people that the County should be eager to welcome - new applicants willing to operate openly and legally in accordance with the opportunities and restrictions set forth in the County Ordinance, well established and available for anyone to assess. These are the business people who have decided they can work within the County's legal framework and build a viable business. Why put them off for another eleven months and risk losing them altogether?

Phase 3 applications may be somewhat easier for the Planning Department to process because there will not be the ambiguities of having to prove prior cultivation or the complications of relocation, and the Phase 3 zoning districts allowed for new cultivation are clear and straightforward. Opening Phase 3 will further the process of directing this industry to areas more accessible to customers and services, where environmental conflicts are minimized and water availability more secure, and where future growth can be accommodated, just as intended by the original Ordinance and the adopted MND.

If the County plans to confront non-permitted growers in an effort to bring at least some into the legal system as tax-paying residents and business people, Phase 3 provides a path for those willing and able to do so.

Do not delay Phase 3. We think it is a good and logical step toward meeting the social, economic and environmental goals of the Ordinance and its accompanying MND.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely, Ellen Drell for the Willits Environmental Center