

ORDINANCE NO. _____

**ADOPTING AMENDMENTS TO WCC TITLE 20 (ZONING) REGULATING THE PRODUCTION, PROCESSING,
AND RETAIL SALES OF RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA IN WHATCOM COUNTY AND REPEALING
ORDINANCE NO. 2021-066**

WHEREAS, on November 6, 2012, Initiative 502 was passed by the voters of the State of Washington, amending Chapter 69.50 RCW and providing the regulatory framework for cannabis producers, processors, and retailers to become licensed by the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (“WSLCB”); and,

WHEREAS, on November 16, 2013, the WSLCB adopted final cannabis licensing rules as codified in Chapter 314-55 WAC. During the period between November 18, 2013 and December 18, 2013, the WSLCB accepted cannabis license applications for cannabis production, processing and retail facilities. Whatcom County began receiving notifications of proposed cannabis facilities from the WSLCB in mid-December 2013, and the WSLCB began issuing cannabis producer, processor, and retail licenses to qualified applicants in March of 2014; and,

WHEREAS, on January 16, 2014, the Washington State Attorney General issued an opinion stating that Initiative 502 does not preempt counties from banning or placing additional regulatory requirements on cannabis related businesses within their jurisdictions; and,

WHEREAS, the Prosecuting Attorney and Planning and Development Services (PDS) had at the time implemented a zoning interpretation policy, which stated that PDS would regulate cannabis proposed uses as allowed by Initiative 502 in the same way as any other commodity that is grown, processed, or sold in Whatcom County, it became evident that many of those proposed locations could conflict with other surrounding uses; and,

WHEREAS, on February 11, 2014, the Whatcom County Council adopted Ordinance 2014-011, an emergency ordinance imposing a moratorium on the acceptance of all building and/or land use applications that pertain to cannabis producers, processors, retailers and medical cannabis collective gardens; and,

WHEREAS, the County developed and implemented several sets of interim regulations during that time, though none were deemed appropriate by the Council as permanent regulations; and,

WHEREAS, on March 31, 2015, the Whatcom County Council adopted Ordinance 2015-006, which contains the current County zoning regulations for recreational cannabis type uses, treating cannabis similar to other agricultural products; and,

WHEREAS, Whatcom County Code (WCC) 20.97.227 defines marijuana production as a facility licensed by the state Liquor and Cannabis Board to produce, harvest, trim, dry, cure, and package marijuana, and sell marijuana at wholesale to state-licensed marijuana processors and other state licensed marijuana producers; and,

WHEREAS, WCC 20.97.227 states marijuana production may take place either indoors within a fully enclosed secured facility or a greenhouse with rigid walls, a roof and doors, or outdoors in non-rigid

greenhouses, other structures or an expanse of open or cleared ground fully enclosed by a physical barrier; and,

WHEREAS, Ordinance 2015-006 allows for the production and processing of cannabis in the Rural (administrative uses), Rural Forestry (permitted uses) and Agriculture zone districts (permitted uses), subject to a proposed facility meeting several stated use standards. Such standards include odor controls (for indoor grows only), lighting, traffic and parking control measures, as well as setbacks of 1,000 feet from community centers and 300 feet from residences not located on the same property. The ordinance also allowed for the production and processing of marijuana in the Rural Industrial and Manufacturing, Light Impact Industrial, and Heavy Impact Industrial districts as permitted uses, subject to odor control measures (for indoor grows); and,

WHEREAS, the WSLCB is no longer issuing new licenses, existing licenses throughout Washington State can be transferred and Whatcom County was notified by the WSLCB of approximately 30 recreational marijuana production and/or processing renewal licenses last year (2020) within unincorporated Whatcom County; and,

WHEREAS, while earlier licensees were small, local producers, their licenses now appear to be being transferred to larger operators with more capital who are buying up the earlier licenses and expanding and/or changing operations and/or locations; and,

WHEREAS, prior to adoption of the first moratorium on issuing new permits for certain marijuana production facilities, the Council, Executive, Planning Commission, and PDS received complaints from residents adjacent to existing and proposed cannabis facilities regarding excessive odor, lighting, and potential water usage, suggesting that the County's cannabis regulations may not be sufficient; and,

WHEREAS, on March 23, 2021, the County Council adopted the 2021 Docket, a component of the PDS work plan, including item PLN2021-00009, to "Review and revise Whatcom County Code relating to marijuana growing and processing in rural areas. Consider impacts of marijuana growing and processing facilities in rural areas, and evaluate growing and processing facilities as an agricultural or non-agricultural use. Consider compatibility with GMA and County Comprehensive Plan." However, due to the pandemic, the Planning Commission and County Council have backlogs of other issues to address, and PDS will need time to work with the community to properly develop and process any potential regulatory amendments; and,

WHEREAS, on April 20, 2021, the County Council adopted Ordinance No. 2021-023, imposing a six-month interim moratorium prohibiting the filing, acceptance, or processing of new applications for permits or authorizations for recreational marijuana production and/or processing facilities which are proposed to operate outdoors or in greenhouses; and,

WHEREAS, on October 26, 2021, through the adoption of Ordinance No. 2021-066, the Council extended that moratorium for an additional 6 months; and

WHEREAS, once this ordinance is adopted and effective there is no longer a need for the interim moratorium imposed by Ordinance No. 2021-066;

WHEREAS, pursuant to the Washington State Constitution, the general police powers granted to counties empower and authorize Whatcom County to adopt land use controls to provide for the regulation of land uses within the County and to provide that such uses shall be consistent with applicable law; and,

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The County Council placed on the County's annual docket PLN2021-00009, directing Planning and Development Services (PDS) to: "Review and revised Whatcom County Code relating to marijuana growing and processing in rural areas. Consider impacts of marijuana growing and processing facilities in rural areas, and evaluate growing and processing facilities as an agricultural or non-agricultural use. Consider compatibility with GMA and County Comprehensive Plan."
2. Whatcom County Planning and Development Services (PDS) submitted an application (PLN2021-00009) to revise the County's recreational marijuana production, processing, and retail sales zoning regulations.
3. A determination of non-significance (DNS) was issued under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) on September 29, 2021.
4. Notice of the subject amendments was submitted to the Washington State Department of Commerce on September 13, 2021, for their 60-day review.
5. On October 14, 2021, the Planning Commission held a duly noticed public hearing to consider testimony on the proposed draft amendments.
6. The County Council held a duly noticed public hearing on the proposed amendments on November 23, 2021.
7. The amendments are consistent with the Growth Management Act, Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 314-55 WAC, and other applicable requirements.
8. The proposed amendments reflect current local circumstances and promote the general public health, safety, morals and welfare.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The amendments to the development regulations are in the public interest.
2. The amendments are consistent with the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED by the Whatcom County Council that:

Section 1. Amendments to the Whatcom County Code are hereby adopted as shown in Exhibit A.

Section 2. Ordinance No. 2021-066 is hereby repealed in its entirety upon the effective date of this ordinance.

ADOPTED this _____ day of _____, 2021.

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

ATTEST:

Dana Brown-Davis, Council Clerk

Barry Buchannan, Council Chair

APPROVED as to form:

() Approved () Denied

/s/ Royce Buckingham (approved via e-mail) / JL

Civil Deputy Prosecutor

Satpal Sidhu, Executive

Date: _____