

# Cannabis Lounges Approved in Santa Cruz County

## **Santa Cruz Approves Cannabis Consumption Lounges and Farm Pilot Program**

### *Supervisors Vote to Allow On-Site Consumption at Dispensaries and Farms*

SANTA CRUZ — In a landmark decision on Tuesday, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors approved the first reading of ordinance amendments permitting on-site cannabis consumption at local retailers and select farms in unincorporated areas.

The measure, which narrowly passed, saw Supervisors Kim De Serpa and Monica Martinez voting against it. Under the new rules, existing cannabis dispensaries can establish on-site consumption lounges, provided they adhere to strict smoke-free workplace guidelines and air pollution regulations. Additionally, the board agreed to launch a three-year pilot program allowing on-site sales and consumption at cannabis farms.

### **Expanding Legal Consumption Beyond Private Residences**

Currently, there are no legal public spaces in Santa Cruz County where cannabis can be consumed, aside from private residences. Proponents of the new policy argue that creating designated consumption areas will provide a boost to the struggling cannabis industry by attracting more customers and increasing tourism appeal.

“This is about creating a viable, legal framework where there will be more opportunities for productive social interactions, education, and responsible consumption,” said Supervisor Manu Koenig, who has worked alongside Supervisor Felipe Hernandez on this initiative since 2023.

### **Concerns Over Impaired Driving and Public Safety**

The decision has sparked debate, with some community members and dissenting supervisors voicing concerns about potential increases in intoxicated driving. However, Koenig believes the new policy could actually help promote safer consumption habits.

### **The Road Ahead: Next Steps for Implementation**

Before the ordinance takes effect, it must go through a second reading and final approval in an upcoming meeting. If enacted, Santa Cruz County would join a growing number of jurisdictions exploring Amsterdam-style cannabis cafes following a new California state law allowing local governments to permit such establishments.

While the new policy signals progress for the cannabis industry, it also presents regulatory challenges, including enforcement of consumption rules, ensuring compliance with public health regulations, and managing potential community concerns.

The coming months will determine how the county balances economic opportunities with public safety as it moves forward with these historic changes.

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