

Santa Barbara County 2021 CSAC Challenge Executive Summary

Category: Housing, Land Use & Infrastructure

Overview:

Beginning in 2016, the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors adopted a series of ordinances, changes, updates and refinements to regulate cannabis operations within the County's jurisdictional areas, all while engaging the community through more than 100 public meetings thus far. The County's cannabis regulation and licensing ordinance is broadly divided by permitting (zoning, land use) led by the Planning and Development Department, and business licensing led by the County Executive Office. It wasn't until early 2018 that the Board addressed retail storefront licenses and voted to limit storefront licenses to no more than one in each of six Community Plan Areas (CPAs). For the industry, six was not enough and securing a license would be competitive. For many community members, six were six-too-many.

Challenge:

The challenge was creating a fair and legal process for retail storefront operators to apply while also leading a transparent outreach program to ensure the community had every opportunity to provide input. The Board established a merit-based criteria scoring system for applicants vying for a cannabis retail storefront license that became operational February 13, 2020. Per the ordinance, the process was required to commence with community engagement meetings in each CPA and receive input for the [Neighborhood Compatibility Scoresheet](#) and address questions and concerns about security, traffic, parking, odor, and proximity to sensitive receptors (schools, daycare, youth sports). Six community engagement meetings had been scheduled to begin in April 2020, but were cancelled due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. To prevent further delay, virtual community meetings were scheduled to take place in July 2020. For many in the community, virtual meetings and using Zoom was new, uncomfortable and seen as a barrier to participation by those who either preferred in-person meetings or were technology-challenged.

Solution:

Switching to virtual meetings meant easy access for attendees from across the county and elsewhere. We could have hosted one or two countywide virtual meetings, but opted to host six virtual meetings, one per CPA. Each Q&A session gave precedence to the featured CPA, followed by all other questions and comments. We also accepted questions in advance that were addressed in the virtual meetings. The public could attend all or part of six meetings that generally would not be a viable option had they been held in person across the county. Our objective was to create as many ways as possible to engage and inform the community. Content presented at in-person meetings is usually not available in advance, nor would it be seen by individuals attending Zoom using a phone without video capability. We created a bilingual presentation and narrated a video version for each CPA with zoning maps that depicted the areas where cannabis retail storefronts could or would not be allowed. Four weeks prior to the first of six meetings,

press releases, e-news, social media, and CSBTV announced the meeting series and directed the public to the [website](#) to access the bilingual presentation; narrated videos; maps and map tutorials; Zoom links and a tip sheet on how to participate by Zoom, phone, and in writing; and a neighborhood compatibility survey with an interactive map.

Innovation:

The interactive mapping, tutorials and survey were a good use of innovation, but revisioning outreach during a pandemic and proactively mitigating hurdles to enable the community to feel fully engaged using new technology and old school tactics was an innovative approach. Preparing materials so far in advance allowed the public to feel more informed and demonstrated our commitment to full transparency, engagement, and getting it right.

Results:

The survey was live for more than eight months and generated 343 responses. The cannabis website generated nearly 12,000-page views in June 1-July 31, 2020. Total site visits in 2020 was just under 70,000.

Replicability:

Aside from ARC GIS software for mapping and the survey, the outreach campaign strategy and methodology can easily be replicated. To reach stakeholders where they are in changing times, evaluate methods to ensure a robust, multifaceted, transparent engagement strategy.

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