

Resist! Repeal! Refund! Recall!

On August 23rd, The Civil Liberties Monitoring Project and other organizers gathered alongside the highly educated, conscious, earth honoring farming community of Southern Humboldt, at the Mateel Community Center to voice their total dissatisfaction with the County's cannabis permit process, ineffectiveness of protecting the environment, and abatement actions. 75% of abatements thus far have targeted mostly small, mom and pop grows in Southern Humboldt, under the guise of protecting watersheds and the environment. But no one was buying the political rhetoric. Brandon stated, **"People are being strangled by this process... that's why we are all here actually because of this process, it sucks. We should be leading that state in tourism, clubs, garden tours, garden schools, yet instead we lag in a county quagmire. I see a snake eating its own tail; I see a county consuming itself from the outside in... Streamline this process. This should be a boom time not an economic depression."**

The abatement program, (which one local lawyer said is likely unlawful on 5 counts), is ONLY necessary due to the impossibility of working with the County Government to get permitted. These abatements could have been avoided entirely had the county heeded many warnings to stop being so greedy and make the permit process attainable for the majority.

One speaker from a consulting firm, passionately explained her experience with the county taking way too long to approve permits, and then penalizing those, even in the process, with raids. She stated, **"We can scale it down and make a real simple answer- get these permits approved... it's egregious what's happening, the wait... We have 13 farmers in Dinsmore and Mad River, applications are not being moved forward because we need Cannabis Airspace Variance."** If you are wondering 'what does airspace have to do with anything,' yes, the county's claim is that a cannabis plant somehow inhibits air travel. Yeah.

Humboldt County has made the permit process so incredibly impossible, mind numbing, ever changing, confusing and expensive that most farmers chalked it up to a waste of money, and gave up. The abatement actions are in effect, punishment for those who don't trust the County, while the county has given farmers zero reason to trust them. This fact was not lost on the speakers who one by one bravely stepped forward to share their experiences.

Nay Madison commented, **"John, I believe you're a good guy, trying to do a good thing. I need you to hear loud and clear that you are doing a lot of harm. Pillars in this community are being damaged. I'm one of them I've lost my home; I've lost everything I have."**

One speaker discussed what she called the, 'life shattering, deep changes happening in So Hum,' and stated, **"The level of commitment we need is 100x more than what we have here."** She professed to the panel, **"Let's be real please, let's commit to what these farmers are asking for and make this work for our community. We could be a beacon for the world. I don't know if you guys realize what you're missing. If you don't set up a system that works for us, we will not succeed."**

The abatement program hit its height in May-August, and has distributed approximately 400 abatements so far. It has already raised \$2.5 million for the County. When we calculate the notices average of 3 violations, each with a minimum \$10k fine (\$30k per x 400), that's \$12 million. If the fines are applied for 90 days, it could rake in hundreds of millions more, and countless liens on property. The County Staff panel (absent Fish and Wildlife) featured mainly responses from District 2 Supervisor Estelle Fennel and Planning and Building Department's (PBD) Director John Ford.

Ford explained, **"The fines are really a mechanism to have everybody understand that the county is serious about enforcing the law. I know it seems a money grab but its really not... we want compliance... There should be incentive to get into permit, and to come in to compliance."** Where is the county's incentive is to make an effective permit process and serve their constituents? The only thing this abatement program seems to be deterring is the basic survival of the majority.

The Civil Liberties Monitoring Project panel added, **"One of the reasons we might not have taken it so seriously is that the hills were blowing up for years, the county did nothing, and all of the sudden the little ones are getting abatements. That's a part of the frustration."**

Another speaker explained that she tried to turn in her permit, but was a day late, so they wouldn't take it. Now she has an abatement, and added, **"You on this panel have all of the power to determine how Humboldt County will pull through this process so my question is why not send a letter to everyone saying- permit or quit and if you don't we'll send you an abatement (as seen in LA, Mendocino and Santa Barbra). That seems like a really decent thing to do in a county like ours, if you actually care what's going to happen. I'm having a really hard time believing you guys' care... I don't feel like all this notice we supposedly got was enough."**

Another speaker described her experience to the panel, **"This whole thing seems like all stick and no carrot. I'm in both permit and abatement process. Still, I cannot suggest people go into permit process. The only reason is to not be abated on... there's two sticks and were being beat on both sides, there's no incentive. I had to do the same thing as my neighbor with 7 acres. I'd like to know how many permits have been approved and their size. I know no one with a 2k sq. ft. permit."**

Ford described the size of abated farms, and why the larger more egregious sites are not often busted, **"The smallest one that got an abatement on was 500 sq. ft. ... a lot of the things that would appear to be egregious violations also have permits on them."** That's right, mega-mono-crop farms who can 'pay to play' have County support to destroy the environment if they choose, while tiny, often 215 farms who couldn't afford or navigate the permit process are under attack.

Mona also voiced her frustration with the permit process and abatements, explaining she too got the 3 most common fines (cannabis, greenhouse, grading), and, **"[The abatement notice] was left on my land gate on a Friday afternoon, you have only 10 days and you cant even talk to somebody for 2, just to give you an idea of how frustrating that feels. I was at PBD in 2 days, with photos of my empty greenhouse; there was no marijuana on the land. ... none of this happens quickly, the idea that I have a \$30k fine, day after day is outrageous, I am shaking, I am furious and frustrated... One last thing, if you're considering having an office hours in Garberville, we have plenty of county buildings here that are dilapidated that could use renovation."**

Many speakers brought up the irony of So. Hum's 'dilapidated' county owned buildings, next-to non-existent social services, and their attack on small farmers, often for structurally sound greenhouses. One stated, **"I'm doing the best I can to get permitted. My friends called me a carpetbagger, which I resent... Some things I see happening in our community, I see our roads are still terrible, the hospital. I think it takes 2 years to build hospital, I don't know what's going on with that."**

The economic impact of these abatements (and permit process), have immense consequences, regardless of affiliation with the industry. Consequences of which, our county has proven ineffective at addressing, such as failing structures, small business', addiction, overdose,

suicide, mental illness, homelessness, crime, roads and the like.

Cinnamon stated, **"I tried to warn people but they were dazzled by legalization. Why aren't we regulating cannabis like an agricultural product? I want to remind folks there is no other crop with a tax on it. Why aren't we taxing rice, wheat or grapes used for alcohol? This could have all been solved if you rolled out Prop 64 with agricultural regulations that we already have in place. The minimum taxes on a bud are four times... Our kids and non-profits are losing big time on this. I don't know how we are going to raise money this year and that's the trickle down of what's going on around here."**

Many folks at the meeting were not surprised by the County's actions. This is and always what legalization promised, a corporate take-over of our non-corporate environmentally conscious tri-county region. The effects are seen in the small business' boarded up and left empty all over Garberville the size of permitted grows (often required to afford elaborate fees), and in the non-profits struggling to stay afloat. Leaving those with foresight, with their heads in their hands wishing 'I told you so' would bring some solace or solution. But of course it doesn't; were all on this county orchestrated rollercoaster ride heading off a cliff.

Paul Encimer passionately spoke to the hearts of those in the room that evening. Some media outlets claim Paul's life-long advocacy for the unheard poor and disenfranchised, and devotion to hold power accountable, is 'outlier thinking,' which is terrifying to consider and really speaks to why we are in this mess to begin with. The room's response to his speech seemed a more accurate depiction of his work, demonstrated in the roaring applause and support for his propositions. Encimer encouraged the community to get organized around 4 R's: RESIST corruption, RECALL Supervisor Estelle Fennel (etc.), REPEAL the ordinance 2576 (etc.), and REFUND the 2.5 million in fines thus far stolen from small farmers and the community at large. Encimer also highlighted that the county was still operating out of 'resentment, revenge and retaliation' against farmers even in the legalization process.

Fennel gave one of her infamous happy-spin speeches directed at the room of concerned community members, while The 'Civil Liberties' Banner fell to the floor. Such appropriate metaphorical poetry from an inanimate object, screaming exactly what I was thinking, 'What happened to our civil liberties!?',

Fennel said, **"You can't just point [to the panel] and say you have to make this right for me, there is a role for everybody in this. Change has happened and its up to people to make it work. I've often worried about the power of the negative message. I think the negative message resonates more easily than the positive one, that requires work. We have people saying, don't go for a permit, stay in grey market, they only want your money."** And one audience member appropriately yelled out, **"But your designing this, not us."**

Fennel's typical rose-colored-glass slant is part of what is so offensive. She used to be a news director at KMUD Free Speech Radio, a supposed non-bias trusted-ally to the whole community; quite a contrast to today. The 'negative message,' is but an Orwellian term for the truth of what's actually happening, as demonstrated by nearly every single speaker there who explained they couldn't navigate the permit process, and now enduring terrorism via abatements.

When Kelly Lincoln asked Fennel, **"Is it true that your partner works for a permitted grow?"** Fennel nearly choked, hesitated and responded, **"absolutely--"** (insert mumble), Lincoln asked for clarification. Fennel quickly stated, **"--not... absolutely not."** The fellow sitting next to me said, **"Well that's a bold faced lie."** Fennel proceeded to claim the question (held by many in the room), was a personal attack. The People have a right to know their public official's business interests.

Eugene 'ED' Denson, local Civil Rights Advocate and Attorney, elaborates on why the community is so disenfranchised by Supervisor Fennel,

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