It would seem the permits issued to the legal marijuana growers of Okanaogan county are being threatened with loosing their agricultural zoning and being told to potentially have to cease operations, and move their farms by January of 2017 as par the proposed Amortization Period. I would like to recommend very strongly against re defining marijuanas out of agriculture and modifying the zones in which marijuana can be grown.

The Liability to these permitted farms, and the tens of millions that have been invested to be legal marijuana growers will be huge. The agricultural zoning is being contested for complaints such as smell, lights, traffic, fear of overdose from smelling, second hand smoke, youth access, increase crime, and many other concerns. As an agricultural product the smell of marijuana is no more intrusive than manure from cows, pigs, chickens, horses, goats, fresh cut alfalfa, or toxic sprays on orchards all of which are allowed with agricultural zoning and are happening on a much larger scale than the relatively small amount of space that currently farming marijuana. Every other crop in this county has just as much if not more impact on traffic, smell, dust, and machinery. Marijuana is a plant that grows in dirt under the sun, to label it as anything but agriculture would be a incorrect political statement. It would set a poor precedence to agriculture as a hole forcing invested farms to move over relatively small concerns that can all be mitigated within reason. There is also some concern that has been voiced over citizens fearing they will get high from smelling the raw plant and overdosing, or that there is pot smoking going on on the farms. Marijuana is thus far known as being impossible to overdose on, and you cannot get high from smelling plant matter. THC has to be heated and decarboxylated in order to become a psychedelic compound within the human brain. Further the smell of marijuana comes from terpenes not THC and are found throughout nature in other plants and are not isolated to the marijuana plant. The LCB also has strict rules in place preventing smoking from taking place on legal farms as well as age requirements. No persons under 21 are permitted to be on a 502 farm with the risk loosing license and all their investments. All farms are also mandated by the state to have heavy security at all time. It seems that the majority of some of these concerns are merrily misconceptions that can be remedied with education.

Okanogan is one of the most economically challenged county's in the state. No crop has more value per acre than marijuana or has the potential the create as much revenue and jobs in such a small agricultural space. It uses less land, water, chemicals, energy, and has much less local negative impact than other cash crops. In this county alone marijuana business create jobs and employ upwards of 1000 people which is estimated to be around 5-6% of the county's work force. And in a time where the county has lost almost 3,500 jobs over the last years, the we should be supporting and encouraging growth. Couple that with the millions of dollars that are being brought into the county though sales from the west side that are being re distributed through employment, services, supplies, and taxes, this industry is a beneficial asset to the county.

In closing the liabilities from the proposed zoning changes as well as the amortization period that would force existing licensed farms to move would be damaging the economy and set a bad precedent not only to marijuana but all agricultural crops in the county. The county voted in overwhelming fashion to legalize marijuana, to let a small handful of people with minor, uneducated complaints undermine this industry and the people who have invested heavily into it would be an injustice.

Bruce Bernhard Lazy Bee gardens investor