

Erin Dunn
Community Comment
October 10, 2017

This is Erin Dunn of the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce with a Community Comment.

I didn't want this to be my topic today. But I've been haunted by a photo of a Fortuna Resident—who officially lives in the County just over border from the Fortuna city line—looking from their deck toward their neighbor's land. Growing almost up to the fence line is a vast pot grow. A mature pot grow. With a guard standing there staring back at the camera.

This person and their family built their dream house on that plot of land. They built next to Ag Land because they value the qualities of Ag Land. But Ag Land meant something entirely different just a few years ago.

I always thought Ag Land meant that's where you were going to grow vegetable crops or graze cattle. Never did I dream that Ag Land would come to be synonymous with where you grow pot.

Pot growing in residential areas—in Fortuna's case, just over the City line—has a bigger impact on smaller communities like Fortuna than it does on urban areas.

Legal grows and retail of cannabis has been heralded as a wonderful opportunity for municipalities—tax income, new businesses, etc.

But what does it really mean for a small town like Fortuna? We are impacted in different ways than a larger town like Eureka.

We're more compact, there's no "outer limits" to Fortuna. There is no business park or industrial area that doesn't have homes surrounding it.

Fortuna is already bursting at the seams needing for business office space. Imagine if a Pot retailer came in and offered twice as much in cash for an office space. I get that it would be hard to turn down.

Our neighbor Hydesville, being smaller than Fortuna and regulated by the County, is experiencing a renaissance. Anecdotal information says more and more of long-time Hydesville residents with beautifully tended homes are selling, albeit for a profit, and leaving. Do the growers moving in volunteer for the fire department, or donate to little league—or even living there? I hope so.

The impact of our County's number one business on our small rural areas is devastating. But Cannabis dollars rule.

The Fortuna City Council is trying to keep Fortuna out of the fray and I applaud them. County officials—where are you? Have you ever stepped foot on the ground you are issuing permits for? In a perfect world, you would be required to visit a site and talk to the neighbors BEFORE you issue a permit. And people who grow on Ag Land in the Fortuna sphere of influence should have to live there.

I would sleep better at night if I could just get that image out of my head of the Fortuna resident and their pot growing neighbors. But that's not going to happen any time soon.

This has been Erin Dunn with a Community Comment.