

WHITNEY HODGES

SHEPPARD, MULLIN, RICHTER & HAMPTON LLP



PIONEER SPIRIT As a land use attorney by trade, Whitney Hodges became interested in cannabis after the legalization of medical marijuana in California. "The idea of a brand-new use introduced a whole new vernacular and shook things up in the real estate industry. I couldn't find research about it happening previously, so I began monitoring legalization nationwide."

TRAILS BLAZED Hodges represented some of the earliest cannabis retailers in San Diego in applying as operators and facilities as they navigated a confusing number of variations in new laws. After California's landmark passage of Proposition 64, the state's requirement for cannabis operators to obtain authorization at both the state and local levels for permits led to difficult entries for many businesses. "These retailers were the very first to apply under the San Diego law allowing medical marijuana consumer cooperatives. We were figuring out how the new ordinances and regulations functioned, and we worked with the city of San Diego to refine the regulatory scheme." In representing a client looking to open a retail facility within 1,000 feet of a Chuck E. Cheese, Hodges dealt with questions related to the definition of minor-oriented facilities. "When Proposition 64 passed, the world was not ready, and sometimes not willing or able, to apply it."

FUTURE EXPLORATIONS Hodges sees the rise of cannabis as the next industrial revolution in California. But she sees investment activity pausing for the next 6-18 months. "Investors are waiting to see if it becomes more popular before pushing for public trading as a consumer product. But once we fully obtain banking regulations, there will be more growth, with the right people coming to the industry for the right reasons."