

Clinic says smoke shop needs to go away

By Gideon Marcus

VISTA — The Odyssey Smoke Shop off East Vista Way ran afoul of its neighbors the very day it opened up for business. Erica Leary and John Byrom, two drug prevention specialists with the Vista Community Clinic, took the podium at the Aug. 26 City Council meeting to protest the new store.

The smoke shop sells a wide and eclectic variety of pipes and other smoking apparatus. Byrom maintained that the items sold at Odyssey were primarily made to be used by illicit drug users, and he emphasized his point by showing the council several items he had purchased that day from the store including a pipe designed to look like a lipstick dispenser.

"The myth that it's used for tobacco does not hold water," Byrom said.

"We're very disappointed that this has come to town," Leary said. "If you think a smoke shop is for cigar aficionados and well-bred pipe smokers, believe me, it's not. It's a market for drug paraphernalia and pot smokers."

The pair's main point of contention was Odyssey's location. The store is just 75 feet from the Vista Community Clinic's drug prevention and rehabilitation center. "They couldn't be too much closer," Leary said.

"These women want to change the way they're living and

SMOKE

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when the environment of the city has a shop that sells drug paraphernalia right next to their facility, it's a lot harder for success to happen," Byrom said.

Odyssey's store owner, Rick Danielson, was not at the meeting, but the lifelong smoke shop proprietor has heard similar concerns before.

"It's a 50/50 line there," Danielson said. "Either you're gonna like us or you don't like us."

Danielson said he cooperates diligently with law enforcement, jokingly pointing out that Odyssey's first customer was a sheriff's deputy who came to buy a pack of cigarettes. Danielson said he never had a complaint from law enforcement in his 30 years of running a similar store in

Oceanside.

"We don't sell drugs — we sell pipes," he said. "We sell a product which is legal in the state of California. Our products are not intended for illegal use. They're intended for legal tobacco use. What people do when they're at home is their own deal."

Regardless of any complaint the store generates in the course of its normal business, the city couldn't shut Odyssey down even if it wanted to.

"The county has said we're not going to prosecute someone for selling a device that you can smoke out of because anyone can argue that you can smoke anything out of it," Vista Development Director John Conley said.

"If it's ... not within 1,000 feet of a school, they can locate (there)," he added. "That's the only thing in our code."