

South Tahoe council – this bud is not for you



By Kathryn Reed

By the end of the year it's possible South Lake Tahoe won't have any medicinal marijuana dispensaries.

On Tuesday the council voted to have staff come up with an ordinance that would ban the three existing collectives as well as any future ones. The divided vote had Councilman Bill Crawford voting no, Councilman Hal Cole abstaining and the other three saying yes.

The vote that appeared to have more to do with emotion than fact was preceded by a presentation by City Attorney Pat Enright that spelled out how to go about banning the medicinal marijuana facilities. He said his report was not biased and that he had no opinion on which way the council should proceed, but his PowerPoint was dominated with material on how to ban these businesses.

Enright started out by saying the council could ban the dispensaries, regulate them or wait until after the November election to see what California voters say about legalizing marijuana. But his presentation did not address the latter two options in much detail.

As the council goes forward, the public will have more opportunities to comment – and likely more notice than the 24 hours given for the special meeting.

Talk of these outlets bringing more crime to town was brought up July 27, but never substantiated. Lt. David Stevenson, who was in the audience representing the South Lake Tahoe Police Department, was never asked to address the issue whether these businesses increase crime. Nor did the council ask him if they reduce the number of illegal pot transactions on the street.

Nor was it discussed if people are going to smoke pot, if it's better for them to ingest the stuff from the dispensaries that is somewhat regulated or take their chances with what the street-grade grass might be laced with.

Six people from the public spoke, bringing a mixed response for the council to ponder.

After the decision, Shelly Arnold, who works for the Tahoe Wellness Collective, said, "We'll fight it. They will never close us down. We're not leaving."

It was brought up at the meeting how it's easy to get a prescription from a doctor for medicinal marijuana – essentially \$200 and it's a done deal. But doctors who are writing illegal scripts are not who the council is going after. Instead, the council wants the pot clubs shutdown even though some people using them are there with legitimate reasons.

Councilmembers Bruce Grego and Jerry Birdwell admitted to never having been in one. Only Councilman Bill Crawford said he had visited two of the dispensaries. Grego and Birdwell said they sat outside at least one club and said the people going in had no visible ailment requiring the use of marijuana.

Cancer patients don't all look anemic with bald heads. Glaucoma would be hard to detect sitting in a vehicle.

This is not to say abuse isn't a real possibility at the clubs. Arnold claims her collective alone has 2,700 patients –

that's more than 10 percent of South Lake Tahoe's population. That is a high percentage even without the other two dispensaries included of locals in need of medicinal marijuana. It's not known where the customers of each of the collectives reside.

In other action at the special July 27 meeting:

- The council agreed to discuss at the Aug. 3 meeting the possibility of buying the *Tahoe Daily Tribune* building to convert it to a City Hall.
- The council agreed to consider moving the Aug. 17 meeting to Aug. 19 to avoid a conflict with the annual Environmental Summit.