

Drug Paraphernalia Ordinance

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Fall River

A store owner was aghast when she found out she'd been unknowingly selling alleged drug paraphernalia to her customers in the form of harmless-looking little roses and pens in glass tubes.

Susan Alexander, co-owner of Dollar Daze, 138 Durfee St., found out the items were used to smoke crack cocaine when she was informed by Karen Fischer, director of the Building Our Lives Drug Free Coalition.

"They were very popular," Alexander said. "I just thought they were cute."

Many more stores selling the little tubes, as well as blunt wrap cigar papers in kid-friendly flavors, know exactly their intended use, according to City Councilor Steven A. Camara, who has proposed an ordinance — his first as city councilor — to make the sale of such paraphernalia illegal in the city.

New Bedford already has a similar ordinance in place.

Camara said the resolution has drug prevention at its core and will reduce access to drug paraphernalia — an approach supported by the BOLD Coalition, a group of students and community members who rally against substance abuse.

Camara, who is also a member of BOLD, said that while developing the economy, cleaning up the environment and increasing educational opportunities in the city are all worthy goals, "putting a dent" in drug use is paramount.

He said it was a starting point and part of a much bigger plan to help people find "value in life and get off drugs." He said alcohol is another big problem.

"If we don't address this scourge of drugs in our neighborhoods, we're going to fall flat on our faces," Camara said.

Camara held a press conference Tuesday at Dollar Daze to recognize Alexander for voluntarily pulling the alleged paraphernalia from her shelves and informing her supplier she would no longer sell the items.

Fischer and other BOLD members were on hand to speak about the paraphernalia and how it entices kids to use drugs and triggers an urge in recovering addicts.

"Half the convenience stores that sell cigarettes sell blunt wraps," Fischer said. "They are for the purpose of smoking marijuana."

About a month ago, city and police officials held a meeting with stores that sell tobacco products to educate them on the sale of alleged drug paraphernalia.

An on-line search turned up dozens of companies selling blunt wraps and smoking accessories.

Fischer held up some of the wraps, many of them packaged with provocative images of women in bikinis and in flavors like grape, juicy Jamaican rum, wet mango and pina colada — all flavors that appeal to youth, Fischer said.

Stores also legally sell the little glass vials that measure about 4-inches tall and a quarter-inch wide. Inside is generally tucked a rose, pen or incense. One side is open and the other is covered by a thin piece of metal foil that can be easily punched out.

"People who use crack cocaine take out the little rose or pen, and insert crack crystals,"

Fischer said. They are then able to use the vial as a crack pipe, she said.

Alexander said she was selling the glass novelty items from a box on her counter for \$1 each. It has since been replaced with lip gloss.

Alexander does not sell blunt wraps. Stores must be licensed to sell tobacco products in order to sell wraps.

Camara said the new ordinance would not target the sale of cigarette rolling papers, which are also sold over the counter in convenience stores.

“I know and see the effect that drugs have on people’s lives,” Camara said. “Ending the demand is really what needs to be done.”

In related news, the City Council Tuesday passed the first reading of a proposal to ban sales of drug paraphernalia in Fall River and forwarded it to the Committee on Ordinances and Legislation for further review.