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Update: Passaic council introduces ordinance to ban smoking in city buildings, parks

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PASSAIC — The City Council on Tuesday night introduced a sweeping ordinance to ban smoking in all municipal buildings, parks and recreation areas.

The ordinance, which was introduced by a unanimous vote, would ban smoking inside and outside all municipal buildings, and would impose fines of up to \$1,000 on serial violators.

If the ordinance is adopted, the city will become the 11th municipality in Passaic County to prohibit smoking on public property. Bloomingdale, Clifton, Hawthorne, Little Falls, Paterson, Prospect Park, Ringwood, Wanaque, West Milford, and Woodland Park have already adopted similar smoking bans.

Haledon has introduced an ordinance that is scheduled for adoption on June 21.

The campaign is being promoted statewide by a non-profit known as Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy.

The organization's executive director, Karen Blumenfeld, attended the meeting to urge the council to adopt the measure. She said the campaign to ban smoking in public parks makes sense because second-hand smoke is so dangerous.

"We know there is no safe level of second-hand smoke at all," she said. Smokers tend to obey such ordinances, she added.

The state of New Jersey is providing free signage to cities that adopt these ordinances.

Blumenfeld said these ordinances save money because cities no longer have to sweep up cigarettes and empty receptacles for discarded butts.

Councilman Terrence Love, who sponsored the ordinance, said there is no down side to banning smoking on public property. Love acknowledged that people would likely continue smoke in the park, but he said it is important to “raise awareness” that smoking is not condoned.

If the ordinance is adopted, it doesn’t mean the police are going to launch a ticket blitz looking for smokers in the park, he said.

“If an officer sees a violation, he’s going to enforce the law,” said Love, who noted that New York City has already banned smoking in its public parks. “But the big part of this is we are trying to raise awareness.”

Council President Gary S. Schaer, a smoker, said he would support the ordinance. “Although smoking is certainly legal, what we are saying is a public park is not an appropriate place to smoke,” he said.

It was also not lost on Schaer that he would no longer be allowed to smoke on the steps outside City Hall, as he often does.

“I have to move 35 feet from the building,” he said.

Passaic’s bill outlaws smoking within a 35-foot radius of the main entrance of any municipal building owned or leased by the city.

The bill also prohibits smoking at all parks and recreation facilities, including basketball courts and playgrounds. The ordinance prohibits either the “exhalation or inhalation” of smoke or “vapor” from cigarettes, cigars, pipes or “electronic smoking devices.” The ban extends to all driveways and parking areas that serve parks, playgrounds and recreational facilities.

City officials said that banning smoking on city property would protect air quality for non-smokers, and also would dissuade children from picking up a dirty and dangerous habit.

The penalty for first-time offenders would be \$250; for a second offense, \$500, and \$1,000 for any subsequent violation. A provision in the bill holds that municipal employees who violate the ban “may be subject to discipline,” according to the city’s code.

A public hearing will be held on the bill on June 26, after which the City Council will vote on the ordinance.

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