

Ridgewood may soon prohibit smoking in public parks

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BY DARIUS AMOS

STAFF WRITER

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The Ridgewood Council is moving forward with a plan to prohibit smoking in all village parks, hoping to drastically reduce litter and improve the overall health of residents.

Council members gave their preliminary endorsement to bring the Global Advisors Smokefree Policy's (GASP) statewide initiative to Ridgewood and create a smoke-free environment in all public parks. Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of GASP, led a presentation last week and urged the council to enact an ordinance similar to one that has already made the rounds in various parts of New Jersey.

If Ridgewood approves the ordinance in coming weeks, the village will be the 15th municipality in Bergen County to adopt the 100 percent smoke-free policy. Smoking is also prohibited in all Bergen County parks. In total, 22 Bergen County towns prohibit smoking in one form or another.

"Your town has a good history in supporting smoke-free and tobacco initiatives," Blumenfeld said, pointing out that Ridgewood, in 1995, banned cigarette vending machines, and then enforced a smoking ban at the Van Neste bus station beginning in 2002.

Blumenfeld and Cindy Meakem, coordinator at the Center for Prevention and Counseling, scrolled through a lengthy list of benefits associated with a smoke-free environment. They focused their argument on educating the younger population and making sure that children never start a smoking habit.

While some towns ban smoking only in certain areas or specific parks, those types of ordinances "send mixed messages," Blumenfeld said.

"One-hundred percent smoke free policy is very good for the children," she said. "We know that 90 percent of people who do start to smoke start before the age of 18. So, whatever communities can do to promote smoke-free environments and tell children smoke-free environments are normal is a good thing."

Meakem described the benefits that a smoking ban would have on pets and other wildlife. The owner of a 100-pound Husky, Meakem said she constantly extracts cigarette packs and butts from her dog's mouth during walks in certain parks.

"Besides our children, [the ban on smoking is] for our dogs," Meakem said.

The two also suggested that municipalities will realize cost savings since public works or other sanitation workers will no longer patrol parks with the purpose of picking up

improperly discarded cigarettes.

If Ridgewood passes the ordinance, the village will receive signs touting the property as 100 percent smoke-free. The signs will come at no cost to the village and were paid for through a state Department of Health grant.

In addition to the signage, stickers with the corresponding Ridgewood ordinance number, if adopted, will be supplied for placement on the placards.

Though council members agreed with the initiative, some raised concerns regarding enforcement and the smoke-free boundaries.

"As long as there are signs, then there are no problems. The signs are clear," Blumenfeld said, referring to existing signs posted in New York City. "In the city ... by just having the signs up and not issuing summonses, the litter went down by 50 percent. There's a lot of bang for the buck just by putting up the signs."

She added that, if Ridgewood decides to go ahead with the policy, the ordinance can be catered to suit the village, including additional smoking prohibition at park entrances and parking lots.

"The signs are really magical and makes it easy," Blumenfeld said. "Because the signs say 100 percent smoke-free public |property ... it lets people know that [a parking lot] too is smoke free. It will be self enforcing and educating."

Email: amos@northjersey.com

http://www.northjersey.com/news/190680431_Ridgewood_may_soon_prohibit_smoking_in_public_parks.html?page=all