

<http://thealternativepress.com/towns/paterson/articles/city-considering-smoking-ban-in-public-parks>

City Considering Smoking Ban in Public Parks

Joe Malinconico

Saturday, March 24, 2012 • 10:00am

PATERSON, NJ – Paterson’s parks may become smoke-free zones.

Municipal officials embraced the idea following a presentation at the March 20 City Council meeting by citizen groups, including a contingent of Paterson youths.

“I hate the smell of cigarettes and I’m not the only child who thinks they smell bad,” Marlett Francisco, a sixth grader at Alexander Hamilton Academy, told city officials. “It’s unfair and selfish and it should be banned from our parks.”

Council members said the city has begun drafting a proposed ordinance that would ban smoking in parks and recreation areas. Paterson Health and Human Services Director Donna Nelson-Ivy said her department has contacted the state about getting help with the cost of “No Smoking” signs for the parks.

“I am definitely in support of this campaign,” said Council President Anthony Davis.

Five other Passaic County towns – Bloomingdale, Clifton, Hawthorne, Wanaque and West Milford – already have enacted smoking bans in their parks, according to the Paterson Integrated Municipal Advisory Committee, a group that’s pushing for the restrictions. In fact, under state law, smoking already is banned in city parks whenever a Board of Education event is taking place there, said Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of New Jersey GASP, a tobacco control policy and legal resource center.

One aspect of the proposal that was not discussed at the council meeting was enforcement. In many Paterson parks, laws that already are on the books are hardly enforced, according to officials and

residents. They say people drink alcohol, use drugs and litter with virtual immunity. Police director Glenn Brown has said the creation of a new special police unit in the city would provide Paterson with additional law enforcement officers who might be deployed on, among other things, patrols in the parks.

In many towns in New Jersey, Blumenfeld said, park smoking bans are self-enforced by residents themselves.

The youths who attended the city council meeting definitely are backing the ban. High school student Harley Huarachi who participates in many park cleanup efforts told the council that areas where people smoke always "are in immediate need of cleanup." Breasia Rodriguez, a 7th grader at School 9, said children sometime pick up discarded butts and mimic adults by putting the cigarettes in their mouth. "Let's keep smoking out of our parks," said Johanna Rodriguez of New Roberto Clemente School.

Paterson already has a strong track record of protecting its youths from tobacco, according to the advisory council. In 1998, the city banned outdoor tobacco advertising from within 1,000 feet of schools, the group said. In 1995, it placed restrictions on the locations of cigarette vending machines to keep them away from children.