

The Bergen Record – Community News (Lodi Edition)

Wood-Ridge is going smoke free in parks

Tuesday, April 30, 2013

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Community News (Lodi Edition) North Jersey.com

Wood-Ridge wants to go smoke free in parks and other public facilities. At a public meeting on April 23, the Wood-Ridge Council introduced and passed on first reading an ordinance complying with the state's Smoke-Free Air Act, prohibiting smoking in public parks and recreational facilities.

These prohibited areas would include, according to the ordinance, all public parks, playgrounds, ballfields, swimming pools and plazas owned or leased by Wood-Ridge. The council voted on the Smoke-Free Air Act ordinance prior to an award presentation of certificates for youth involved in Wood-Ridge cheerleading and wrestling. Mayor Paul Sarlo thought the vote was an important thing for the young people to observe.

"Under the leadership of Councilman Joe DiMarco and the Board of Health, they've done a very thorough review of our ordinances dealing with smoking in all of our public parks and our recreational fields," said the mayor. "So, tonight, we're actually going to repeal an old ordinance which is outdated and is not consistent with the more stringent ordinances that are being passed around the state. We're going to repeal that, and we're going to put in place, on the first reading, the Smoke-Free Air Act, which is a very stringent ordinance, keeping smoking out of all of our parks and our recreational fields." Sarlo thanked DiMarco as well as Debbie Greenaway, president of the board of health, for their leadership.

Karen Blumenfeld, Director of the state's Global Advisors on Smoke-Free Policy, was also there at the meeting and spoke a few words. "I want to thank you so much for your interest in protecting the children from second-hand smoke in all of your park and rec areas," said Blumenfeld. "It's very important to normalize smoke-free environments for children. We know that 90 percent of all people who do start to smoke do so before they turn 18, so whatever you all can do to help children remain tobacco free, it's very important."

Blumenfeld stated that the smoke-free law would be good for people who have allergies to second-hand smoke, heart disease or other chronic conditions. Second-hand smoke can trigger asthma attacks for some people, she said. She also presented samples of signs that Wood-Ridge will acquire now that the ordinance has been passed. These signs will be customized for the borough with stickers stating the ordinance number.

The ordinance states that smoking will be prohibited in all municipal buildings and within a 35 radius of the entrances to municipal buildings. "No smoking" signs will be posted at each entrance. Smoking will be prohibited in all public parks and recreational facilities and, according to the ordinance, this includes "all areas adjacent to such facilities, including but not limited to any parking areas, driveway or drive aisle, which have been designated with 'no smoking' signs."

The council passed both ordinances, Ordinance 2013-8 repealing past code and Ordinance 2013-9 complying with the Smoke-Free Air Act. Greenaway stated that the ordinance would not only help alleviate illnesses aggravated by second-hand smoke, it would also eliminate the concern of discarded cigarette butts. "They are sometimes ingested by children or animals," said Greenaway. "It will also alleviate the concern of accidental fires caused by discarded cigarette butts. It's certainly a positive decision."

"The county offers incentive through the Smoke-Free Air Act. We just had to amend our ordinance to comply so we could take part in the program. The program offers free signage. We'll coordinate with the DPW as to where to put each sign," added DiMarco.

The ordinance is set to be adopted at a meeting on May 21.

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