

## 'Smoke-Free Parks' Proposal On Way To Council

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*Saved under Township Council*

A proposal to limit smoking in the township's larger parks – and ban it outright in the smaller ones – is on its way to the Township Council.

The township Open Space Advisory Committee at its Oct. 15 meeting endorsed a proposal brought by Alice Osipowitz, director of parks and recreation, to create the smoke free zones.

The council would have to create an ordinance instituting the ban.

Osipowitz said the idea was also endorsed by the Municipal Alliance for the Prevention of Substance Abuse and the advisory Board of Health.

Osipowitz told the open space committee that 160 towns in the state have enacted smoking bans in public parks, and the Somerset County parks Commission has created designated smoking areas in its parks.

“Different communities have addressed it in different ways,” she said.

“Smoke-free laws have had a significant impact on the health of people,” she said.

Osipowitz said her proposal was not meant to “punish smokers, or take away people’s right to smoke.”

But, she said, second-hand smoke has become an issue outdoors as well as indoors.

She said making the parks smoke-free would also eliminate the problem of

cigarette butts being dropped on the ground, where they could be ingested by children or pets.

“There’s also the potential for accidental fires,” she said.

Responding to a question of how the ban would be enforced, township manager Bob Vornlocker said those kinds of bans are self-enforced, or enforced by “peer pressure.”

“This is when society polices itself,” he said.

Committee member Bob Mettler said he would support a smoking ban that included areas designated for smoking.

Committee member Bob LaCorte agreed.

“I smoke cigars,” he said. “When I go to my softball games and have a cigar, I will go away from everyone else and smoke my cigar and watch the game.”

Committee member Bob Puskas said having designated areas “could take us out of potential lawsuits down the road.”

Osipowitz noted that county parks are larger and can accommodate designated smoking areas, whereas some township parks are really too small for that approach to be effective.

“It would have to be on a park-by-park basis,” Mettler said. “In some pocket parks, there would not be an appropriate place to smoke.”

With that in mind, the committee voted to recommend that the council create an ordinance banning smoking on township parks, with designated smoking areas where appropriate.

“We’ll just make a recommendation and let the council figure out how to implement it,” said committee member Christopher Williams.

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