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Town OKs smoking ban for parks, playgrounds

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By Philip Sean Curran, *Staff Writer*

Smoking in Maplewood parks and playgrounds was outlawed Feb. 21, although one official expressed disappointment that the ban did not go further.

As expected, the Township Committee voted 5-0 to adopt an ordinance that also prohibits smoking in areas immediately around entrances to municipal buildings.

The decision allowed Maplewood to join New York City and hundreds of other municipalities nationwide that have taken similar steps.

The law takes effect this spring, with first-time violators facing fines up to \$100. Repeat offenders may face up to \$500 in fines.

Karen Blumenfeld, the executive director of the Summit-based anti-smoking organization Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, applauded officials.

She said the restriction would protect residents, particularly children, from secondhand smoke. The push for the law started with a resident, Steven Erde, complaining to the town about seeing cigarette butts in Memorial Park.

Robert D. Roe, the Maplewood health officer, ultimately recommended a total smoking ban in parks and other areas, a prohibition that Deputy Mayor Kathleen M. Leventhal said last month was long overdue for the township.

"I'm pleased that it passed, and it's a very important step in protecting the public health," Roe said in a phone interview Feb. 22.

He said reducing tobacco smoking is an important public-health goal, since smoking is a "tremendous cause" of disease and early death.

Township Committeeman Marlon K. Brownlee supported the ordinance but lamented the town did not do more. He would have liked to include sidewalks around parks, and a ban at smoking at township events.

He noted the town already prohibits anyone from having open containers of alcohol on sidewalks and in other public places.

He wondered why alcohol and smoking were being treated separately. Township Administrator Joseph F. Manning, speaking after the meeting, explained the town would have a campaign to notify the public about the smoking ban.

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