

Montclair councilwoman eyes smoke-free parks

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In July, the Montclair Township Council approved an ordinance to ban smoking in the vicinity of the township's two public libraries. Fourth Ward Councilwoman Renée Baskerville is of the mind, "Why stop there?"

Baskerville, most recently at the Sept. 17 council meeting, has been a vocal proponent of extending Montclair's smoking ban to all township property. In speaking with The Times this past Tuesday, the councilwoman, who is a physician, said that she was inspired when a representative of the New Jersey Chapter of Global Advisors of Smokefree Policy spoke before the council during the same meeting in which it approved the smoking ban outside the libraries.

"When GASP first came in and was talking about "Tobacco Free for a Healthy New Jersey," I, instantly, was very much in favor of it," Baskerville said. "I've been very much in favor of smoke-free [public space]. As a pediatrician, I see all the things smoking does to infants and young children. Second-hand smoke, asthma, all these illnesses."

Baskerville said that her initiative comes at an appropriate time, as the council recently approved the smoke-free library ordinance and several of her colleagues appear to be willing to consider, at the very least, smoke-free parks.

As a member of the township's Services Committee alongside Deputy Mayor Robert Russo and Councilman-At-Large Rich McMahon, Baskerville said that the committee will likely meet immediately before or after the Oct. 1 council meeting to research the precedent of an ordinance banning smoking in municipal parks.

Of New Jersey's 565 municipalities and 21 counties in New Jersey, 208 have ordinances either prohibiting or restricting smoking in public parks, according to GASP Executive Director Karen Blumenfeld.

In speaking with The Times, Blumenfeld said that New Jersey state law already prohibits smoking near all K-12 school-sponsored activities in recreational areas.

State law also empowers individual counties and municipalities to pass ordinances for stricter guidelines than the state prescribes.

Based on GASP tabulations, 11 Essex County municipalities either prohibit or restrict smoking in their parks, including Cedar Grove, Glen Ridge, Nutley and all four Oranges.

Essex County Turtle Back Zoo is also smoke-free, said Blumenfeld, adding that GASP is looking to have smoking prohibited in all Essex County parks.

Baskerville told The Times that, assuming her council colleagues are willing to approve smoke-free municipal parks, she hopes to eventually regulate smoking on all township property.

A reasonable course of action, she said, would be to go to the schools and run smoke-free campaigns similar to environmental advocacy campaigns conducted in schools.

While acknowledging potential hesitancy among her fellow council members, Baskerville said that she would be willing to take a slow, collaborative approach to making all municipal property smoke-free.

"I think we'll be able to have a good dialogue and come up with something that everybody is comfortable with," Baskerville said.

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http://www.northjersey.com/news/225737431_Montclair_councilwoman_eyes_smoke-free_parks.html?page=all#sthash.A59LzjMc.dpuf