



Local News



Sparta may ban smoking on township property

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SPARTA -- Smokers may have to find another place to light up because Sparta is considering a tobacco ban on township property.

Ordinance 12-08 to prohibit smoking, tobacco use or tobacco-related products on township property was unanimously introduced in May. The ordinance was scheduled for a public hearing and final vote Tuesday night, but the Township Council's meeting was rescheduled to Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

"Tobacco has no place at our parks and ball fields,"

said Councilwoman Molly Whilesmith, who recommended this ordinance. "This is an ordinance to promote the general welfare of the community."

Cindy Meakem, of the Center for Prevention and Counseling, will attend Thursday's meeting to deliver no-smoking signs at no cost to the township. If the ordinance passes, the signs will be posted at parks and other public property to alert people.

The ordinance defines smoking as burning, inhaling or exhaling the smoke from a lighted cigar, cigarette, pipe or anything else that can be smoked.

A person will not be allowed to smoke, be in possession of these products or discard of these products on township-owned, leased or utilized property that is open to the public or to which the public is invited. This will include the municipal building, the Department of Public Works building, public parks, trails, and any other public recreational facility or area.

Township Manager David Troast said Sparta cannot regulate people smoking in cars on township roadways, but throwing the cigarette butts out the window could be considered littering and a violation.

If the ordinance is passed, a violation will lead to a fine of no less than \$50 to \$100 on the first offense, \$100 to \$200 on the second offense, and \$200 to \$500 on the third and subsequent offenses.

"We are not saying you can't smoke, we are just limiting locations," Whilesmith said.

Whilesmith, who is chair of the Municipal Alliance Committee, said that since the introduction of this ordinance, she has received support from the public on this issue.

"I am very concerned about drug use in the community and the behavior of our teens," she said. "Tobacco is becoming less and less socially acceptable, and we'd like to carry on that norm so that teens see it as something that is potentially harmful and shouldn't be started to begin with."

She said cigarettes are a gateway drug for teens, and therefore it is important to send a strong message against tobacco use.

"Kids will experiment with a less harmful thing like tobacco before going on to more harmful substance," she said.

Smoking bans have increased throughout New Jersey since 2006, when the New Jersey Smoke-Free Air Act passed. This statewide law banned smoking in enclosed workplaces in the state, including bars and restaurants, and on school grounds. However, local governments can still put heavier bans on smoking, such as Sparta is considering.

"This is an ongoing trend," Whilesmith said, citing statistics that say 140 out of 566 municipalities in New Jersey have similar smoking ordinances.

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