

Ho-Ho-Kus hears presentation on making parks smoke-free

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BY SARAH NOLAN

STAFF WRITER

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One hundred percent tobacco-free parks and recreational areas could be the future for New Jersey, and in fact, more than 30 percent of municipalities in the state already adopted ordinances to keep smokers from lighting up in these public areas.

The Bergen County Integrated Municipal Advisory Council (Bergen County IMAC) is on a mission to make it happen and gave an educational presentation at the June 18 Ho-Ho-Kus Mayor and Council work session on why it might be the right move for the borough.

Bergen County IMAC – a coalition of tobacco control experts from New Jersey and community organizations from Bergen County, including the Bergen & Hudson County Chronic Disease Coalition and the American Cancer Society – hopes to educate policymakers on the benefits of smoke free parks, including protecting people from secondhand smoke, providing a good example for children, and saving money on maintenance costs by reducing tobacco waste and clean-up.

"Residents, particularly children, can go into a park or recreation area and basically recreate and they see adults that are not smoking; it avoids mixed messages that kids very often get," Al Ferrara, coordinator of the Bergen-Hudson Chronic Disease Coalition Tobacco-Free Initiative said. "Daily, about 3,800 youth will try smoking for the first time. Of those, about 1,000 are the new recruited smokers each day."

Program Manager for Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy (GASP) Alan Kantz was also present, and said he's excited to be working on this initiative because they're making an impact and people like it.

Kantz said 187 municipalities in New Jersey have enacted smoke-free policies, which is "a huge increase from even a few months ago," and an advantage to getting on board now is that the New Jersey Department of Health is providing municipalities with free "100 percent smoke free public property" signs available

on a first come, first serve basis. Nearby towns including Mahwah, Paramus, Ridgewood, Waldwick and Westwood have all passed ordinances for 100 percent smoke-free parks.

Kantz and Ferrara believe that while Ho-Ho-Kus may be concerned about policing and enforcement, the signs themselves act as a deterrent to smokers. And they've seen it in action in other municipalities, he said.

"When people see these signs, they will acknowledge them and very peacefully put out the cigarette," Ferrara said.

The borough would have to pass an ordinance designating parks and recreational areas as smoke-free, and Ferrara said it's the officials' prerogative for any ordinance to have a fine assessed to it. However, officials are not sure that smoking in parks and recreational areas is enough of an issue in the borough to pass an ordinance.

"The goal is noble, as far as trying to avoid mixed messages for children surrounding smoking," Mayor Thomas Randall said. "Fortunately in our town, most of the fields and recreation facilities are controlled by the school and there's a no smoking policy on any school property, so it's not an issue. In checking with people in the town whether there is an issue, it seems there's not a lot going on. We have one park, the town green that would be a different story and you've given us a lot to think about."

Still, Ferrara said secondhand smoke is a real danger, with the Environmental Protection Agency labeling it a Grade A cancer-causing agent, similar to asbestos, radon and benzene. He also said studies have shown that second hand smoke exposure has a higher concentration of carcinogens than the smoke the smoker is inhaling.

And, he said, a study conducted in Maryland showed that you need to be 23 feet away from second hand smoke to avoid health issues. Ho-Ho-Kus Health Officer Carol Wagner agrees that smoke-free parks would be an asset to the borough.

"I'm really concerned, especially with the youth and their exposure on a daily basis," she said. "To pass an ordinance and reduce exposure to cigarette smoke, we're going to be way ahead of the game. This not only protects children, but non-smokers as well. There are many nonsmokers who just don't want to be subjected to cigarette smoke."

http://www.northjersey.com/news/215020911_Ho-Ho-Kus_hears_presentation_on_making_parks_smoke-free.html?mobile=1&ic=1