

Pascack Valley Community Life (Bergen Record)

Washington Township Council introduces ordinance to ban smoking in public parks

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PASCACK VALLEY COMMUNITY LIFE

The Township of Washington is the latest municipality in the Pascack Valley to consider a policy to ban smoking in public parks.

During its Monday, March 24 meeting, the council introduced an ordinance prohibiting smoking in any township-owned park, playground, field or recreational facility, as well as in adjacent areas, such as parking lots and walkways.

The ban would apply to the use of cigars, cigarettes, pipes, electronic cigarettes or "any other matter that can be smoked" and the policy would be enforced by township police officers as well as "any individual who observes a violation and wishes to make a complaint," according to the introduced ordinance. Violators face up to a \$250 fine for the first offense, up to \$500 for the second offense and \$1,000 for any offenses beyond that.

The township council will consider the ordinance for adoption at its next meeting on April 7.

Currently, officials in Emerson and Woodcliff Lake are also weighing similar ordinances.

Part of the push to ban lighting up in parks and recreation areas is an ongoing effort by the Bergen County Integrated Municipal Advisory Council to encourage municipalities to adopt ordinances making public places smoke-free zones.

The coalition, which is comprised of tobacco control experts, works to increase public health awareness about the dangers of secondhand smoke, as well as the importance of educating children on not beginning the habit. They've also touted the economical and environmental benefits associated with a ban, including reduced maintenance of parks, as well as limiting the threat that discarded cigarettes pose to pets walked in parks.

Twenty-three towns in Bergen County have policies in place, including Old Tappan, Oradell, River Vale and Westwood. Fifteen of those municipalities have 100 percent smoke-free policies, while the remainder prohibit smoking in one form or another.

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