

Smoking Ban Could Expand in Ridgewood

Proposed ordinance would prohibit smoking on sidewalks in front of school buildings.

Posted by [Devin McGinley](#) (Editor) , January 09, 2014 at 05:20 AM

The Ridgewood Council is poised to introduce an ordinance expanding smoke free zones to the sidewalks surrounding village schools.

A policy came under consideration in early December, after a request from the Board of Education and Valley Hospital to ban smokers from the sidewalks surrounding their respective facilities.

Council members had several concerns with the requests during their first discussion of the policy, soliciting a presentation from advocacy group [Global Advisors for Smokefree Policy](#), which also lobbied the council before its approval of an [ordinance last year banning smoking in public parks](#).

Alan Kantz, speaking on behalf of GASP Wednesday night, did not identify direct precedents for the ordinance, but said there were similar policies in other municipalities for restricting tobacco use in proximity to school buildings.

"I think we're just on the cutting edge of something popular and fairly common," Councilwoman Gwenn Hauck said.

Councilman Tom Riche said he was opposed to the restrictions, citing concerns about the encroachment of personal rights and that the ordinance would be unenforceable.

"We don't have the resources to enforce this and my concern would be that this is the first step in opening a Pandora's box," he said.

While the other four on the dais supported the ban on sidewalks surrounding the schools, Deputy Mayor Albert Pucciarelli and Councilwoman Bernadette Walsh balked at a smoke ban along the sidewalk in front of the hospital, which disallows smoking on its campus and by its employees during shifts.

"I think we have to be very judicious about how we extend government power and regulate private activity," Pucciarelli said. "It would be like using police power to enforce an employment policy."

The ban along the hospital sidewalk was considered in part due to its location along the route to adjacent Benjamin Franklin Middle School, but Walsh speculated a ban would simply push smokers onto other nearby streets.

The ordinance, covering sidewalks touching upon board of education property, will be introduced by the council next week.