

# Sidewalks near Ridgewood school properties may soon be smoke-free

THURSDAY JANUARY 9, 2014, 4:25 PM

BY [DARIUS AMOS](#)

STAFF WRITER

THE RIDGEWOOD NEWS

A village ordinance scheduled for introduction next week would extend [Ridgewood's](#) public parks smoking ban to the sidewalks and rights of way that abut Board of Education property, including all schools and athletics fields.

During its public discussion Wednesday, the Village Council voiced support of the proposed legislation, which emerged late last year following requests from the superintendent of schools and administrators at The Valley Hospital. The majority of the council, however, balked at Valley's component of the request, which sought similar restrictions along the sidewalks that enclose the hospital site.

Representatives from the [Ridgewood](#) school district were not present at Wednesday's council work session; prior school-related commitments prevented Superintendent Daniel Fishbein and BOE President Sheila Brogan from attending, according to Councilwoman Gwenn Hauck.

"They're asking for this as stridently as the hospital has been asking for this. I think this is becoming the norm, more and more," Hauck said, noting the growth of state clean air acts throughout the country. "Things are changing. The idea of not smoking in public spaces is becoming embraced."

Alan Kantz, program manager at the Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, addressed council members this week, offering arguments on behalf of both the schools and hospital. Kantz also appeared before the council early last year and advised the governing body as it considered the smoking ban in parks.

"In front of schools and hospitals, you have a concentrated population of people who are likely to be sensitive to second-hand smoke," he said, noting that GASP studies found "children are more susceptible to smoke than adults, so it makes sense to have [a ban] there."

"At a hospital, we expect to find a population that's more likely to have chronic diseases that are exacerbated by second-hand smoke," Kantz added.

Hospital representatives joined GASP in its appeal to the council, saying existing rules against smoking on the Valley campus would be strengthened if [Ridgewood](#) "broadened that" and removed smokers from sidewalks.

"We view this as a long and overdue move toward protecting the health of our staff, doctors, volunteers, patients and their families, and all those who come through our doors," said Megan Fraser, a hospital spokeswoman and [Ridgewood](#) resident.

Fraser and Pat Miller, a human resources officer at Valley, detailed the hospital's "aggressive" policy for a smoke-free property. They said employees and visitors are strongly encouraged to "suspend their smoking" through the duration of their work shift or hospital stay.

Another part of the hospital's policy, according to Miller, ensures that staff members do not go into the residential neighborhood to smoke.

Protecting the streets surrounding Valley, such as Meadowbrook and Bogert, was a concern raised by Deputy Mayor Albert Pucciarelli and Councilwoman Bernadette Walsh, during discussions in December and again this week. Both were not convinced by the hospital's contentions.

"It sounds like [Valley] has a policy in place that has teeth," said Pucciarelli, who supported the ban in front of school properties. "We have to be very judicious how we extend governmental power to regulate

private activity ... I'm having a problem extending our police enforcement and police powers around sidewalks of a private institution."

Walsh, who lives in the neighborhood of the hospital and Benjamin Franklin Middle School, said she sees smokers on the sidewalks and streets around Valley.

"I do feel strongly that if there is a ban for your business ... they're just going to go to the other streets," she said.

Councilman Tom Riche opposed the sidewalk smoking ban entirely, pointing to the lack of enforcement on zero tolerance rules for minors as well as the slippery slope of preventing someone's right to smoke.

"We don't have the resources to enforce this," he said. "My concern would be that this would be the first step to opening Pandora's Box. The next step would be to prohibit [smoking by] people sitting in a sidewalk café in downtown [Ridgewood](#)."

"I remain committed that we should have less smoking, but I think this is a personal rights issue that we should not enforce," Riche added.

Mayor Paul Aronsohn, who supported smoking bans surrounding [Ridgewood](#) schools and the hospital, agreed with Riche that smokers have personal rights, but added that non-smokers also have rights to clean air. Speaking to enforcement issues, the mayor suggested that residents typically follow rules as soon as they are made aware of them.

"Law enforcement is always an issue," said Aronsohn. "But when people know the law, they'll want to obey."

The council is expected to introduce the ordinance for sidewalks in front of schools at its Jan. 15 public meeting.