

Council introduces ordinance to ban smoking on public property

SPARTA — Lighting up that cigarette or cigar on public property in Sparta could soon carry a stiff fine. The Township Council introduced an ordinance last week that would ban all smoking on Sparta's public property. Ordinance 12-08 states that since the state of New Jersey currently prohibits smoking in all public schools, school grounds, as well as all public school buildings, "The Sparta Township Council believes it is in the best interest of the health, safety, and welfare of the general public to also prohibit smoking and the use of tobacco-related products on all municipal property and grounds which are open to the public or to which the public is invited." The ordinance defines 'smoking' as the burning of, or inhaling and exhaling the smoke from, or even the possession of a lighted cigar, cigarette, pipe, or any other matter or substance that can be smoked. Smoking these products or discarding them in any township areas designated as tobacco-free, or no smoking beyond this point, or on any township-owned, leased, or utilized property which is open to the public will be prohibited. This includes the Municipal Building and its grounds, the Department of Public Works and its grounds, and all public parks, trails, and other public recreational facilities. First-offense fines will be no less than \$50 but no more than \$100. A second offense will carry a fine of not less than \$100 but not more than \$200. For third and subsequent offenses, violators will pay no less than \$200 but fines could be as much as \$500. Currently, around 80 percent of the nation is covered by local and state laws banning smoking. Last year New York City enacted a law banning smoking from its 1,700 public parks and 14 miles of public beaches. Proponents of the ban hope it will reduce the harmful effects of second-hand smoke, which the American Lung Association claims is responsible for 50,000 deaths per year. The ban is also designed to reduce litter in public areas. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's office issued a press release last year stating that 75 percent of the litter found on New York City beaches is comprised of cigarette butts. At least 507 municipalities in New Jersey, California, Illinois, Minnesota, and Texas have public smoking bans. In Sparta, the public smoking ban was suggested by Councilwoman Molly Whilesmith and its introduction was supported unanimously by the council. The council will have a second reading of the ordinance and allow public commentary before they take a vote to enact the measure as law at their meeting on June 12.