



Golfers' cigars knock proposed Scotch Plains smoking ban into sand trap

[Tom Wright-Piersanti/The Star-Ledger](#) By [Tom Wright-Piersanti/The Star-Ledger](#)
Email the author | [Follow on Twitter](#)
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[SCOTCH PLAINS](#) — As Colleen Gialanella played with her 3-year-old son around the outskirts of a Scotch Plains soccer field earlier this spring, she was dismayed by the number of cigarette butts littering the ground. So she decided to do something about it and, being deputy mayor, she thought she could.

But she ran into some opposition she had never considered: smoking golfers Gialanella proposed a ban on smoking on public grounds like the municipal building, and in parks and recreation areas, including Scotch Hills Country Club, a township-owned golf course.

But when the ordinance was scheduled to be formally introduced at Tuesday's council meetings, all three members of the township council voted to delay it, saying they were concerned the ban would keep golfers from enjoying a cigar while hitting the links.

"I was very frustrated with the other members of the council," Gialanella said in a phone interview. "People would be blown out of the water if they had any idea how long it takes" for the council to accomplish what she calls "common sense" measures.

Her proposal was first brought to the recreation department, which supported the plan and urged her to include Scotch Hills, Gialanella said. It was then discussed at a business meeting about a month ago.

The issue of Scotch Hills is thornier than it seems at first glance, she said, because part of the country club is a miniature golf course popular among families with children. "If you were to walk onto a playground and poll the average parent, they would absolutely support a smoking ban," she said. Councilman Bo Vastine says he nixed the introduction because the proposal had been modified to include the municipal building and the golf course without the knowledge of the council, which he said was under the impression those places

had been removed. "I have a 7-year-old and a 9-year-old that play baseball and softball. I don't want them being exposed to someone smoking. But I also don't want you to feel like you can't play a round of golf and have a cigar," he said. Vastine also said he didn't think it would be right to introduce the ordinance without hearing from all parties who could provide insight, such as the recreation department, which was not represented at the meeting.

"Before this thing gets approved without doing due diligence, let's take it off, figure it out," he said. "Everyone who has a perspective on this wasn't present. We did the right thing."

According to Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, an anti-smoking organization based in Summit, Union County bans smoking in all county parks and within 25 feet of government buildings. In addition, Rahway banned smoking around city buildings, and Springfield and Westfield have bans in place for certain recreational facilities, GASP said.

"We are very eager to see 100 percent smoke-free parks, especially for children, because children are very impressionable," said Karen Blumenfeld, the executive director of GASP.

"If there's a partial policy, that defeats the goal of creating a smoke-free environment," Blumenfeld said. "Partial policies give a message to children of, 'It's okay to smoke, just don't smoke in this part of the park.'"

Blumenfeld said smoking bans have benefits even beyond clean air and healthy kids — tobacco is among the leading sources of litter and preventable outdoor fires, she said, both of which will go down when smoking is banned.

In all, there are 196 ordinances in New Jersey — covering 164 municipalities and nine counties — that restrict smoking at recreational and park facilities, according to the American Lung Association.

Gialanella said she understands "there are always going to be last-minute tweaks," but delaying the vote just before summer means all the kids who will be heading out to playgrounds and parks in the next few weeks won't get to enjoy smoke-free facilities.

Still, Vastine said he is confident that with a bit more discussion and planning, smoking restrictions of some sort will come into place before too long.

"I can't imagine anybody involved is absolutely opposed one way or the other, that we can't find a compromise that satisfies everyone's concerns equally," Vastine said.

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