

Bethlehem banning smoking in parks, joining growing list of local towns

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In [Bethlehem](#)'s parks, city residents can swim, play tennis and, in the winter, ice skate. One thing they can't do anymore is smoke.

Mayor [John Callahan](#) has enrolled Bethlehem in the statewide Young Lungs at Play program that prohibits smoking in city parks. A kickoff for the program, which will affect Bethlehem's 39 parks and playgrounds, is scheduled 2 p.m. today. As a father of three, Callahan called enrolling Bethlehem in the program an easy decision.

"When kids see adults or role models smoking in a kind of family-friendly environment, they would tend to see the behavior as a little more acceptable," he said. "Our parks are about getting out in nature and doing things that are healthy," the mayor added. "Smoking doesn't really fit with that."

Bethlehem is the ninth Lehigh Valley municipality to sign onto the initiative, along with Allentown, Easton, Lehigh Township, Pen Argyl, Plainfield Township, Slatington, Upper Saucon Township and Washington Township, Northampton County, according to Jeanne Fignar, policy and research coordinator for Tobacco Free Northeast PA. Allentown's smoking ban, however, doesn't cover all of its parks, she said. And in Easton, city Administrator [Glenn Steckman](#) said he was unaware of a citywide ban on smoking in parks.

In New Jersey, Clinton Township, Flemington, Frenchtown, Hackettstown, Lopatcong Township, Oxford Township, Raritan Township and White Township all ban smoking in their parks. [Phillipsburg considered such a ban in March](#) but town council tabled it over concerns about whether it was needed, how it could be enforced and if it would infringe on residents' rights.

Tobacco Free Northeast PA has experienced resistance to its efforts as well, Fignar said. Some municipal officials say they don't want to task their police departments with enforcing a smoking ban and others have said they don't want to risk losing park pavilion rental income, she said.

Bethlehem is expecting its policy to be mostly self-enforcing, like similar bans on alcohol in most parks and littering citywide, Callahan said. "We hope people would see the signs and comply," he said. Tobacco Free will provide the smoke-free signs for all of Bethlehem's parks, Fignar said. Most towns require smokers to leave their parks if caught, though a few institute fines, she said.

In addition to the health benefits, many towns also support the smoking bans as a way to keep their parks cleaner through the reduction of cigarette butts, Fignar said. Callahan, who said cigarette butts on Bethlehem's sidewalks are among his pet peeves, also pointed to that benefit. Other detritus from smokers in city parks can include cigar packaging.

New Jersey-based Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy complimented Bethlehem on initiating the parks-smoking ban, though Executive Director Karen Blumenfeld said she thought it was somewhat ironic smoking is still permitted at Sands Casino Resort Bethlehem. Her group also advocates against smoking in casinos. "At perhaps the largest indoor playground for adults, smoking is still permitted," she said.

[Easton also bans smoking in Centre Square](#), which Steckman said the city hasn't received any recent complaints about. "I haven't really heard anybody complain about it (in) well over the past year," the city administrator said. "A lot of people are getting onto the bandwagon that secondhand smoke is not good for you.

Regional Editor Kurt Bresswein contributed to this report.

http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/bethlehem/index.ssf/2013/08/bethlehem_joins_growing_list_o.html