

Smoke-free parks are proposed in Fair Lawn

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Fair Lawn – Could parks in the borough become smoke-free?

The Fair Lawn Health Advisory Board hopes so.

"It is a statewide initiative," said Carol Wagner, the borough's health officer.

She noted the Fair Lawn Health Advisory Board wanted to bring the idea for smoke-free parks to the council for approval because it wants to protect residents, especially children.

It has been in contact with the New Jersey Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy (GASP), which has already had success with the initiative in Passaic County.

"Smoke-free parks are an easy policy option that has good results," Alan Kantz from GASP told the council at the Oct. 23 work session.

Al Ferrara from the Bergen County Department of Health Services noted that there are 10 parks in Bergen County that are smoke-free, but none are under this initiative.

It was noted that all school properties in the state are already smoke-free and that Memorial Pool in Fair Lawn has a designated smoking area.

Kantz provided the governing body with an ordinance used by the City of Passaic and showed council members the signs from the New Jersey Department of Health that could be available from the state to place in the parks. The metal signs state "Breathe easy this public property is smoke-free." It was noted that the signs are available for free now, but it is not sure how long they will be available.

So far 155 municipalities in New Jersey have some type of smoke-free policy for recreation areas and of those 79 are 100 percent smoke-free, said Kantz. In those 79 municipalities he said there have been no reports of serious conflicts because of the change.

"Once people experience smoke-free outdoor areas they like it," he said.

Some of the benefits, according to Kantz and Ferrara, of the smoke-free parks is that it reduces litter, eliminates second-hand smoke and sends a message to children about not smoking.

"Exposure to smoking, seeing people smoking, being around smoking is a major factor that leads kids to start smoking themselves," said Kantz.

Ferrara noted that second-hand smoke can be just as harmful outdoors as it is indoors.

"I have a problem not only with the no smoking areas in public places, but also with the no smoking area in parks," said Deputy Mayor Ed Trawinski.

Trawinski said people who smoke have a right to use the facilities. He added he would support designated smoking areas, but not a complete ban because smoking it is not illegal.

"Don't people who smoke have a right to enjoy their parks with a cigarette," he asked.

For certain behaviors, Kantz said there are appropriate times and places. He compared it to alcohol, which is not illegal, but you would not want people to do it at a park.

Councilwoman Lisa Swain offered her support of the initiative.

"We need to take a stand that we are going to protect our youngest citizens and their caretakers from the smoke," she said.

Some council members expressed concern about enforcement. Trawinski called it another burden for the police department.

Kantz said the borough has discretion when it comes to writing the ordinance and enforcement. As an example, he said New York City only gave out warnings in the first year and put up signs, but it reduced the amount of litter from cigarette butts by 50 percent.

Borough Attorney Ron Mondello pointed out what he believes is an unexpected consequence of the policy. As the public defender in Paramus, he has seen people charged under the statute for smoking in smoke-free areas who then have it on their record for five years.

Deputy Mayor John Cosgrove said in concept it is a good idea, but had concerns about the five-year record. He also spoke to the litter caused by cigarette butts. As a Sunrise Rotary member he has gone to Berdan Grove to clean the park adopted by the club.

"If you go there it is disgusting," he said about the butts.

The council, with Trawinski voting no, agreed to have Mondello review the material from GASP as well as the sample ordinance.

http://www.northjersey.com/community/176713311_Smoke-free_parks_are_proposed_in_Fair_Lawn.html?page=all&mobile=1&ic=1