

Long Branch beaches made smoke-free

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LONG BRANCH — The city's public beaches are now smoke-free after the council on Tuesday unanimously agreed to prohibit the use of cigarettes, tobacco and chewing tobacco along the oceanfront.

That means the only public beachfront in the city where smoking still is permitted is Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park, which is owned and operated by Monmouth County.

Violeta Peters, a city resident who serves on the Monmouth County Board of Recreation Commissioners, said as far as she knows, the issue of smoke-free beaches at Seven Presidents has not been discussed. She is just starting her second term on the board.

“But now that public beaches right next door have been declared smoke-free ... we would certainly be up for discussing it,” said Peters.

County Recreation Superintendent Andrew Spears said the issue does not appear on any upcoming board agenda, although it could be placed there rather easily – by a resident who could write a letter or come to a meeting, by a recreation commissioner or by a staff member.

He said Monmouth County already prohibits smoking in any public building and within 25 feet of such buildings and those include park facilities. But the issue of outside recreation areas has not been tackled.

“There are no pending proposed changes in our rules,” he said. “Ultimately, it is up to the board.”

Meanwhile, the city is considering expanding the prohibition to all public parks, said Mayor Adam Schneider. While smoking remains a permitted use on the city's boardwalk, that also could change in the future, he said.

In 2003, the city limited smoking to designated beachfront areas.

Since then, business at the city's beachfront has boomed, officials said, and as more and more people visited the beaches, it became more and more difficult to isolate smokers or to enforce the limited ordinance.