

NorthJersey.Com/ Wayne Today **Wayne Way Ahead of State With Public Park Smoking Ban**

Debra Winters, June 5 2014

WAYNE – With legislation quickly moving through the state Assembly to curtail smoking in public parks and beaches, Wayne Township was way ahead of the trend, having an ordinance in place since 2005.

The state Assembly recently overwhelmingly passed its bill by a vote of 67-7 with four abstentions, according to reports. Violators would face fines from \$250 to \$1,000.

Smoking is already prohibited by the state in all indoor public facilities. This bill would cover all parks and beaches operated by the state, counties, and towns.

About 220 of New Jersey's 565 municipalities currently have such a parks and beach ban in place, including Wayne Township, which has about 30 parks and recreational areas that it owns. The township ban also includes the parking lots of these facilities. The ordinance was later amended in 2012 to include the Barbour Pond Park facility.

"We thought years ago that it was important enough to ban smoking at all parks and recreational areas especially where young people participate in events at. It was a proactive move on our part," said Mayor Chris Vergano. "It's about time the state caught up with us on such an important issue."

Fines for breaking the township ordinance includes a fine no more than \$2,000 or a prison term and/or community service not to exceed 90 days.

Patrons at the new Friends and Family Park playground, on Black Oak Ridge Road, applauded the bill. And whether the state legislation, if passed, would succeed the town's ordinance all depends on how it is written.

"I think the legislation being proposed is a great idea," said Barbara Martin, of Wayne, who was at the playground with her grandson. "And I think Wayne is progressive enough to implement a ban of their own. I never smoked. And I'm also a nurse so I know the effects of smoking."

Maggie Dongen, also of Wayne, a mother of three, frequents the playground often said she is "overjoyed" to learn of the ban.

"It's terrific that Wayne already did something. Me being a nonsmoker, I don't like secondhand smoke, especially around my kids," she said.

Councilwoman Nadine Bello, who heads up Ward Six where the Friends and Family Park is located, had similar views.

"As a township we try to be as environmentally health conscious as we can be. But we can only monitor as much as we can. It's not feasible to have a police officer at all of our parks at all times. We have to hope that the public takes heed to the rules." Bello said.

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