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## Smoking ban in parks proposed for Cedar Grove

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BY DAN ROSENBLUM

STAFF WRITER

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With smoking banned in restaurants and public buildings, is it time to start extending a ban into Cedar Grove's parks?

Last week, the Cedar Grove Advisory Health Council - a volunteer panel of health care workers - recommended that the township enact such a regulation. Under their proposed Breathe Easy/Smoke Free Parks Initiative, smokers in Cedar Grove's parks would be encouraged to keep cigarettes in their respective packs.



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That initiative hasn't been crafted into an ordinance, but as laid out in a memo to the Township Council, the proposal would rely on signs to keep smokers from lighting up in a public park. There would be little cost to the township, according to the initial proposal, as compliance would be self-enforced. **The New Jersey Department of Health supplies free metal signs to communities that adopt "100 percent smoke-free" policies covering parks, according to an agency release.**

**"In many of these communities, self-enforcement - as long as there are signs present - does work," said Karen Blumenfeld, an executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy (GASP), a New Jersey-based anti-smoking group.**

The idea has not yet been formally proposed to the township council. If the council is supportive of the initiative, the health panel will review other town's policies, legal templates and retool it for Cedar Grove, according to the health council's Chair Eileen Bogdanowicz. An ordinance would also go through legal review.

Some council members who were polled about the plan weren't yet aware of the proposal, but indicated there could be an uneasy compromise between Bloomberg-styled public health measures and individual freedoms.

Mayor Robert O'Toole said he was aware of health issues, but wary of "restrictions on people who have the freedom to smoke if they want, as they're not interfering with anybody else's health," he said.

"I see nothing wrong with it," he added of the personal choice to smoke.

O'Toole said he quit smoking about 40 years ago as an example for his children, but that smoking indoors and outside were "different scenarios." O'Toole said if the proposal has merit, he and the council would hear both sides of the argument at an upcoming council meeting.

Council members E. Romeo Longo and Joseph Chiusolo, who said he was a non-smoker, said that they were not briefed on the ordinance, but they would be in favor of promoting awareness as opposed to police enforcement.

**When two GASP representatives presented their case to the health board in June, according to meeting minutes, they presented a volume of arguments including setting a healthy example for children and reducing litter from**

cigarette butts, which costs the township money in clean-up costs and can be a danger to pets. But their most pressing argument is based on recent evidence that secondhand smoke in concentrated outdoor areas compare to levels found indoors.

There is some precedent. Twenty years ago, Cedar Grove banned smoking at the children's swimming pool as well as within 25 feet from government buildings, Blumenfeld said. In 1995, it also restricted the locations of cigarette vending machines.

"Cedar Grove has been proactive in promoting smoke-free living since 1993," Blumenfeld said.

Smoking bans have become more commonplace since then.

In 2006, New Jersey banned smoking in restaurants, schools and other facilities while they are being used by students. New York City banned smoking in parks in 2011. Eight towns in Essex county currently restrict smoking in parks, according to a list provided by Blumenfeld. Those include the Oranges, Fairfield, Nutley and Irvington. In July, Little Ferry passed such an ordinance and Montclair banned smoking on library grounds and 50-feet away from the library. (Some town bans also include electronic cigarettes.)

Presumably, municipally owned parks like Community Park, George Street Park, Tranquility Park near South End School and Morgan's Farm would all be covered in the ban.

Blumenfeld said she was not aware of any tobacco ordinances in Verona. Sanitarians at the Montclair Health Department, which regulate some aspects of Verona health codes, did not return a call placed by the Times. But in Verona, as in Cedar Grove, the largest greenswards are county-owned parks like Mills Reservation, Hilltop Reservation and Verona Park. Thus far, there are few countywide bans, aside from one at Turtle Back Zoo.

Essex County Spokesman Anthony Puglisi said there were preliminary discussions about following through with a ban in county parks, though he hadn't yet heard plans to move forward.

Email: [rosenblumd@northjersey.com](mailto:rosenblumd@northjersey.com)



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