

Ridgewood proposal may ban smoking in parks - NorthJersey.com

RIDGEWOOD — The council will advance a plan that would outlaw smoking in all village parks, but would not expand that ban to include other public places.

A proposed ordinance could go to a vote within the next two weeks and would designate parks in Ridgewood as smoke-free environments.

More than 140 municipalities in New Jersey have banned cigarette smoking in open public spaces, including 14 towns in Bergen County.

While the governing body agreed cigarette smoke presents a health hazard to non-smokers, it stopped short of banning smoking on sidewalks.

Councilman Tom Riche said he couldn't support extending the ban to public right of ways when the village is ill-prepared to enforce such legislation.

"It becomes a Pandora's box because we don't have the police force to enforce non-smoking on a public sidewalk," Riche said. "I think there are bigger and better things to worry about."

Riche pointed to a village ban on underage smoking, and said "zero summonses have been issued" to violators since its passage.

"The issue I have is we have laws on the books already that are not being enforced, why would we add to them?" he asked.

GASP, a policy center promoting smoke-free initiatives statewide, will provide the borough with signs that could be installed around parks, detailing the ban.

Mayor Paul Aronsohn said aside from cutting down on cigarette litter in Ridgewood, the ordinance was important because it sends "the message to children that smoking is bad."

At least one business owner voiced an objection to the ban.

Gary Kolesaire, an owner of the Tobacco Shop of Ridgewood, said the ban would likely reduce smoking in town, decreasing the amount of federal subsidies to SCHIP, a state-funded health insurance program created for low-income children and parents.

"If people stop smoking, this [program] will not be funded, and these impoverished kids will have a problem with health care," Kolesaire said. "I am in agreement we need cleaner air, provided the borough also passes an ordinance that stops all automotive traffic within a half-mile of the park. Then, the air will be clean."

Email: harrisc@northjersey.com

http://www.northjersey.com/news/194593751_Ridgewood_proposal_may_ban_smoking_in_parks.html?page=all