

Smoking ban gets green light in Ridgewood

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It's official: Smoking is now banned in all parks, playgrounds and sports fields owned or leased by the Village of [Ridgewood](#).

After several months of discussion and scratching a handful of drafts, the Village Council finalized and unanimously approved its smoke-free parks plan last Wednesday.

As part of the initiative, [Ridgewood](#) will receive more than 70 signs declaring areas as smoke free. The signs are provided by the Center for Prevention and Counseling (CPC) through a state Department of Health grant at no cost to municipalities that adopt a smoking ban proposal.

"I want to commend you and thank you for being proactive in health in your community," said Cindy Meakem, CPC coordinator. "I used to come to [Ridgewood](#) a lot when I was younger; my father was in the American Legion and I used to march with him in the Memorial Day Parade. Unfortunately, I had to stop doing that because he passed away from [complications due to smoking]. So thank you very much."

Speaking on behalf of the [Ridgewood](#) Health Department, Carol Wagner thanked the council for approving the ordinance. She also spoke on behalf of another demographic.

"Thank you especially for the children's population, those who can't get up to speak but want to use the parks and the playground equipment," Wagner said. "How many times are there adults nearby giving a mixed message and exposing children to second-hand smoke."

The village's new smoking prohibition also includes all facilities, property and structures owned or leased by the [Ridgewood](#) Board of Education. The BOE already enforced its own smoke-free rules, but inclusion in the recently passed ordinance secured new signage for district properties.

Smoking is also banned at all municipal facilities, including buildings that are "occupied by employees and agents of and/or persons authorized by the Village of [Ridgewood](#) and used for official business," according to the ordinance. Areas such as the plaza between Village Hall and the Ridgewood Public Library and the

entrance to the Community Center are now smoke-free.

Council members previously debated the inclusion of locations such as sidewalks and streets, but those ideas were squashed after lengthy debate. The ordinance specifically notes exclusions to the prohibition: "the seating areas along East [Ridgewood](#) Avenue on the north side of Memorial Park at Van Neste Square" as well as all parking lots, sidewalks and public streets.

"It's been a long journey, and I commend you for your deliberation and your attention and concern regarding this ordinance," said Al Ferreira, representing the [Bergen County](#) Department of Health. "You can have a very good situation in the village for all the residents and all the visitors in regards to the parks and recreation areas. People can enjoy themselves ... without the hindrance of second-hand smoke exposure."

The smoking ban will be enforced by the [Ridgewood](#) Police Department, and final penalties for violators will be decided by the municipal court. The ordinance recommends that a warning or \$50 to \$100 fine will be issued to first-time offenders.

Fines will increase to \$100 to \$150 for second-time offenders, while three or more violations may net fines of no more than \$500 upon conviction.

In addition to the monetary penalties, which do not incorporate administration fees, the court may sentence the violator to community service.

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