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Somerset Count may expand its smoking ban

Published: Sunday, September 26, 2010, 6:03 AM



Eugene Paik/For The Star-Ledger

SOMERSET COUNTY — Proposed updates to Somerset County’s anti-smoking policy could make it tougher to light up in county parks and buildings.

County officials are looking to expand the current policy, which bars smoking inside county buildings and at playgrounds in county parks. The proposed changes would widen the ban to prohibit smoking at building entrances and exits and at more recreational facilities.

“My sense is that it will probably be very popular,” said Bev Hacker, the county’s director of human resources. “We all share county facilities with the public.”

The Somerset County freeholders want to hold off on a decision until the completion of a cost analysis and a recommendation on legal issues involved in changing the policy. Further discussion could happen at the freeholders’ Oct. 12 meeting, county attorney Tom Miller said.

Last month, a 17-member county task force proposed the updates, which included a smoking ban within 50 feet of entrances and exits of county buildings and in county recreational areas such as playgrounds, ballparks, softball fields and tennis courts. Smoking would also be prohibited around bleachers and in restrooms.

“These (new) policies would not be very restrictive,” Hacker said.

A third proposal that called for a complete ban -- both indoors and outdoors -- on county property did not receive much support from the freeholders, she said.

According to Freeholder Director Jack Ciattarelli, the proposed changes reflect a nationwide trend. Many government officials are broadening smoking policies in the name of public health, he said.

“There has been a feeling among elected officials nationwide ... that we had to lead the way to a healthy lifestyle,” Freeholder Director Jack Ciattarelli said.

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