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Elizabeth bans smoking at all municipal buildings, parks, properties

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ELIZABETH — Elizabeth is joining the ranks of other towns banning people from lighting up on its grounds, but went a step further by outlawing smoking anywhere on its properties.

An ordinance passed unanimously Tuesday night by the city council, and signed today by Mayor J. Christian Bollwage, prohibits smoking even outside city buildings, in city parking lots, recreational areas and buildings used or leased by the city. City employees also are banned from smoking in city vehicles.

The municipal ordinance goes into effect April 15 – 20 days after its passage.

“This new ordinance will set a better example for children and drastically reduce litter in our public areas,” said Second Ward Councilman Nelson Gonzalez. “The City of Elizabeth constantly encourages a healthy, sustainable lifestyle for its residents, so we should be doing everything possible to encourage good health and this smoking ban is one of them.”

Anyone caught lighting up is subject to a \$100 fine and at least 10 hours of community service for a first offense.

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of NJ GASP (Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy), said 75 towns in the state have established smoke-free set-back zones from their municipal buildings, but Elizabeth is one of the few that have restrictions beyond that.

“We’re very pleased to see that Elizabeth, which is one of the larger communities in the state, has really taken a lead in the county,” she said.

She said the bans help create healthy environments where children congregate, reduces municipal maintenance costs, reduces the risk of fire and cuts down on tobacco waste in the water.

Bollwage, who gave up smoking 40 years ago, said he’d often noticed employees smoking under an overhang above the handicapped entrance at the front of City Hall and others standing at the top of City Hall’s rear steps. Members of the public would often have to walk through smoke clouds to take care of city business, he said.

But the final straw, he said, was in January when he had vocal cord surgery for leukoplakia – a white plaque – and his doctor instructed him to avoid all second-hand smoke.

“It is in the best interest of the city, as well as employees, to prohibit smoking on municipal grounds. Tobacco pollution is a serious public health problem and second-hand smoke is not

just an annoyance, but a serious hazard to all who are subjected to it,” Bollwage. said. “By creating a ban on smoking, we are proactively taking steps to create a healthier environment and there is no better place to begin then right here at City Hall.”

He said he signed an executive order a few years ago banning city employees from smoking in city vehicles, but some workers still violated that, resulting in either a day off or a verbal reprimand.

The ordinance specifically prohibits “inhaling from, exhaling the smoke from or the possession of a lit cigar, pipe, cigarette or other matter or substance that contains tobacco or any other matter that can be smoked, inhaled or exhaling of smoke or vapor from an Electronic Smoking Device,” also known as E-cigarettes.

The ban does not include medically prescribed inhalation devices such as inhalers, respirators or oxygen tanks.

Michael McFadden, mid-Atlantic regional director of the Citizens Freedom Alliance, which advocates for smokers’ rights, the claims about the effects of second-hand smoke on non-smokers are overblown.

“The whole second-hand smoke thing is nonsense when you’re talking outside,” he said.

He said there are better ways to deal with the influences on children and the litter.

“If they’re worried about setting better examples for children, they ought to get rid of the smoking ban in bars. It pushed smokers outside where the children can see them,” McFadden said.

As for litter, it’s better to fine litterbugs for all kinds of litter rather than to punish people before they may even toss a butt onto the ground, he said.

Plainfield is the only other community in Union County that has a smoking ban as extensive as Elizabeth’s, Blumenfeld said.

http://www.nj.com/union/index.ssf/2014/03/elizabeth_bans_smoking_at_all_municipal_buildings_parks_properties.html