

The Times

Trenton, Bordentown Township consider smoking bans in outdoor areas

By Kelly Johnson/The Times of Trenton

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Bordentown Township Mayor Jim Cann believes that parks are meant to be for healthy activities, like playing ball or flying kites, so people shouldn't be puffing on cigarettes in the same space, he says.

“Here we are promoting healthy acts at our parks, and we have people smoking there!” Cann said. “It just doesn't make sense.”

Bordentown is considering a ban on smoking in parks and other outdoor public areas, following the lead of a rising number of towns in New Jersey that have done the same thing.

Almost 200 counties and towns in New Jersey have outlawed smoking in outdoor areas, including Princeton, which in April became the first town in Mercer County to implement such a law. Trenton is considering such an ordinance, and Burlington and Mercer counties also recently banned smoking in certain areas of county parks.

Smoking bans in the state include penalties that usually consist of fines.

Princeton's ordinance allows police to slap first-time violators with a \$250 fine; the second offense is \$500 and subsequent offenses are \$1,000 for any. Trenton is considering adopting the same schedule of fines, but council members have been split on the proposal and have not yet voted to introduce the ordinance.

Alan Kantz, program manager of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, a nonprofit that promotes smoke-free environments in New Jersey through education programs, said that while many

municipalities are instituting similar penalties, tickets are rarely issued. Most smokers respect the no-smoking zones when they see the signs, Kantz said.

“With most communities that make their parks smoke-free, we find that enforcement is mostly self-enforcement — enforcement by police is very rare,” he said.

Princeton Health Officer David Henry said the no-smoking ordinance in his town has been effective and no one has gone to court yet for violating the ban.

“It also sends a strong message to young people that smoking is something that they shouldn’t do now and shouldn’t do when they grow up either, and it also protects vulnerable residents from second-hand smoke, which can be dangerous even outdoors,” Kantz said.

Ethan Hasbrouck, the New Jersey advocacy director for the American Cancer Society’s Cancer Action Network, said that he is very pleased that so many towns in the state are banning smoking outdoors. He expects that the initiative will spread to other states.

“Many people think that encountering second-hand smoke outdoors is not dangerous, but that’s not the case,” he said.

The Wrong Impression

Hasbrouck said 3,800 children nationwide try their first cigarette every day, and smoking in parks and other outdoor areas makes the act seem like a social norm to children.

“The less they see, it’s more likely they will not use it themselves,” he said.

Michael Boonin, a spokesman for Mercer County, said the Mercer County Park Commission recently made its parks smoke-free.

“The park commission adopted the resolution in February approving a

non-smoking policy for all commission playgrounds and it was amended in April to include other areas in the park system where other adults and children may be present. Now it encompasses all commission playgrounds and fields,” he said.

James Brownlee, Trenton’s health officer, is proposing an ordinance for the city that would prohibit the consumption or possession of any lighted tobacco product in public parks, recreational areas, playgrounds, on municipal grounds and other property owned or leased by the city.

Upon first hearing about the potential law, smokers in Cadwalader Park in Trenton Preston Scott III and Arnest Scott Sr. said they thought the ordinance would be “crazy.” “You can’t control everything. If you don’t want to smoke, you don’t want to deal with it, then there’s plenty of room in the park. That’s my opinion,” Preston said.

When asked how they felt about anti-smoking advocates’ argument the ban would provide clean air for everyone, the brothers said they would be willing to cooperate with that.

“I respect that. It really would be good for everyone, smokers too,” Arnest said. As Trenton resident and former smoker Michael Fitzpatrick walked through the park with his 5-year-old niece, he said it is important that his niece not to be around second-hand smoke.

“If they need a place to smoke there should be a designated area for them. Not the total area, but maybe half of it,” he said.

Karlene Farquharson, a Trenton resident and frequent visitor to Cadwalader, has a differing opinion.

“I think it’s kind of drastic and bordering on infringing on people’s rights and I think there are other things that really are more harmful that they should be paying attention to. For example, someone in their backyard can use a backyard fogger, an insecticide, which is something pretty damaging and dangerous. It’s airborne. Just like smoke it can come over into my area, into my face,” she said. “We

have no protection against that. I think that's something that's more likely a hazard than second-hand smoke because you're in an open area. As soon as it comes out it's dispersed, it usually isn't a big problem."

Mill Hill resident and civic activist Jim Carlucci argued at a recent city council meeting that a Trenton smoking ban would fall into the same category as many other city ordinances — like cleaning up pet waste in the parks, a leash law or a ban on drinking alcoholic beverages in the parks — that go unenforced.

Staff writers Jenna Pizzi and David Karas contributed to this report.

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