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## Englewood taking steps to raise age limit to buy tobacco products

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ENGLEWOOD – The city council is taking steps to raise the age limit for purchasing tobacco products as it tries to curb smoking in public places.

The governing body introduced two measures during the June 24 meeting that would limit smoking, including electronic cigarettes, within the city. The first ordinance would prohibit anyone under the age of 21 from purchasing tobacco or tobacco-related products from city vendors. The second ordinance would prohibit smoking on public property, including city parks and buildings.

The ordinances originated from the city's Board of Health, which passed two resolutions detailing the measures during its April 9 meeting. Lisa Wisotsky, president of the Board of Health, presented the resolutions before the council on May 13.

Under state statute, people under the age of 19 are prohibited from purchasing cigarettes. The State Senate passed a bill on June 5 that would raise the age limit for purchasing nicotine products to 21. The Assembly has yet to introduce a similar bill.

If the council raises the age limit to 21, the city would become the first municipality in the state to do so.

Representatives from The League of Municipalities, the state's Office of Legislative Services and the Attorney's General Office all declined to comment about whether municipalities are able to raise the age limit above the state limit. And, City Attorney Bill Bailey did not return calls for comment.

Twenty-nine municipalities across Bergen County have passed resolutions for smoke-free public parks. The city would become the fourth municipality in the Northern Valley region to ban smoking in public areas.

First-time violators found smoking on public property will pay a fine no less than \$250. Second-time violators would have to pay \$500, with each subsequent offense costing \$1,000.

A municipality can earn up to 45 points on its Sustainable Jersey certification by taking measures to make the community smoke-free, according to Global Advisors Smokefree Policy (GASP), a non-profit organization that promotes "smoke-free air and tobacco-free lives." Adopting an ordinance that prohibits smoking on public property adds 10 points toward Sustainable Jersey, a statewide certification program that encourages communities to "go green."

Council President Lynne Algrant, who coordinated the city's certification process for Sustainable Jersey, said she was excited that an initiative originating from the Health Department will also further the city's environmental goals. She believed the move would also reduce litter of cigarette butts at public parks.

"The truth of the matter is people who can't smoke in indoors have a tendency to smoke in the very places people gravitate to for fresh air," said Algrant. "You don't want to have cigarettes butts around the playground and park benches."

Ward 3 Councilman Eugene Skurnick said he supported the ordinance since smoking is unhealthy and was long overdue. He said the ordinances mirrored measures adopted by many cities, including New York City.

Ward 4 Councilman Wayne Hamer said he supports public health initiatives that encourage people to move in a positive direction.

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