

Smoking ban extends to Ridgewood sidewalks near school properties

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For the second time in a nine-month period, the Village of Ridgewood has taken a proactive step in reducing residents' exposure to second-hand smoke and promoting public health, particularly in children.

The Village Council last week officially extended the smoking ban in municipal parks to include all sidewalks adjacent to Ridgewood Board of Education properties, including playing fields and schools. The council opted not to include sidewalks in front of The Valley Hospital, despite appeals by hospital officials and support from smoke-free advocates.

The Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy (GASP) have assisted Ridgewood in drafting its smoking ban ordinances. Alan Kantz, GASP program manager, appeared before the Village Council this year and pushed for the smoke-free sidewalks.

"In front of schools and hospitals, you have a concentrated population of people who are likely to be sensitive to second-hand smoke," he said, noting that GASP studies found "children are more susceptible to smoke than adults, so it makes sense to have [a ban] there."

Councilman Tom Riche previously opposed the sidewalk smoking ban, suggesting that the Ridgewood Police Department lacks the necessary resources to enforce the ordinance. He also said the village might be encroaching on an individual's right to smoke.

"We don't have the resources to enforce this," Riche said earlier this month. "My concern would be that this would be the first step to opening Pandora's Box. The next step would be to prohibit [smoking by] people sitting in a sidewalk café in downtown Ridgewood."

"I remain committed that we should have less smoking, but I think this is a personal rights issue that we should not enforce," he added.

Kantz and other council members, however, argued that smoking bans are typically self enforcing.

"Law enforcement is always an issue," Mayor Paul Aronsohn said. "But when people know the law, they'll want to obey."

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