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Smoke-free zone: Gloucester City smoking ban paves the way for other towns

By Rebecca Forand | South Jersey Times
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Lighting up that cigarette while walking from shop to shop is now illegal in one South Jersey city's business district, and other towns are looking to do the same.

Gloucester City, in Camden County, has recently spent a lot of money beautifying its three-block business district. There's been planters purchased, landscaping done and new streetlights installed.

But one thing kept popping up and ruining the aesthetic the city's governing body was going for — cigarette butts were everywhere.

They littered the ground in front of stores. They were in the new planters, stubbed out in the dirt.

"Any time you walked down there it was just cigarette butts all over," said Gloucester City Mayor William James, a smoker himself. "It was very noticeable. Otherwise it wouldn't have come to our attention."

Now, with a new ordinance in place and signs mounted throughout the three-block area, smoking is off-limits.

While there's been some pushback and negative reviews of the ban, the mayor insists it's all for the good of the city and the benefit of the businesses that occupy the area.

"Some people aren't happy with it, but it's three blocks. Just don't smoke in those three blocks," he said.

Banning smoking in certain areas isn't necessarily a novel idea. Some beaches in New Jersey have recently outlawed smoking in order to keep butts out of the sand and second-hand smoke affecting other sunbathers, and many businesses have their own outdoor smoking areas to keep it away from their non-smoking customers, but it's rare to see a municipality outright ban lighting up on a public street.

With Gloucester City as an example, however, some are looking to do the same.

In Harrison Township, with downtown Mullica Hill's Main Street — where the town has invested in new sidewalks, street lights and plants — Mayor Lou Manzo is going to bring

up the idea of enacting its own ban of cigarettes at the next township committee meeting.

"As we continue to build up the aesthetic of the Main Street, it's something I think is a great idea," he said.

When people are walking from shop to shop and put out their cigarettes, they inevitable get flicked onto the sidewalk or street, he said, ruining the look and atmosphere desired.

Swedesboro has already outlawed smoking in parks and playgrounds, but is also looking to curb the habit along its own main road, which is home to multiple businesses including a yoga studio, restaurants and

Clothing shops.

"It really comes down to secondhand smoke and keeping the downtown looking nice," Mayor Tom Fromm said. "It's something worth looking at.

The borough is currently working with the health department to work out a plan to get rid of the smoke as much as possible, but there's one drawback for them. Swedesboro is home to a cigar shop on its Main Street, so the borough council has to balance a way to keep the look of the town with maintaining the customers of a thriving local business.

"If we want to do a complete ban it's something we have to talk through," Fromm said.

As for Gloucester City, those caught lighting up in the business district will be issued a warning for now, but soon it will be a \$100 fine.

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