



Metuchen snuffs out smoking in parks and near public buildings

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METUCHEN — Air will be a little cleaner in the borough thanks to a new law that prohibits smoking in parks and limits it around municipal buildings in Metuchen.

The Borough Council voted Dec. 1 to approve the ordinance after mulling it over for several months.

“I’m very happy that Metuchen is joining hundreds of other **New Jersey** municipalities in making our parks greener, healthier and cleaner by prohibiting smoking, and that we are adopting setback zones for our municipal buildings,” said Councilwoman Allison Inserro, who spearheaded the ordinance. “Over the next few months, when we review our insurance and personnel policies, I want to make sure that we are giving our employees more incentives and information about ways to stay healthier, including giving up tobacco products.”

While the ordinance outlaws smoking completely in borough parks, it creates a 50- foot no-smoking setback around municipal buildings. However, two borough-owned structures — the Fire Department and Department of Public Works (DPW) buildings — will have designated smoking areas outside.

Officials decided in October to allow designated smoking areas at the two locations when considering that some of those who work there are smokers.

While saying the ordinance is good for the borough because it eliminates the prospect of second-hand smoke sullyng the air for nonsmokers, Mayor Thomas Vahalla explained the exceptions to the law.

“I also realize that we do have volunteers and people that work that do smoke — not that I’m encouraging it,” he said.

Vahalla and other officials agreed that volunteers play an important role in the borough, and

said they wouldn't want to alienate any of them.

The mayor also pointed out that DPW workers often are required to work long hours, and should not be prohibited from smoking as long as they do so in the proper area.

Under the ordinance, however, no borough employees who drive municipal vehicles may smoke in them.

The police, fire, recreation, public works and health departments will all be responsible for enforcing the new regulations, and violators will be hit with a minimum fine of \$250 for a first offense, \$500 for the second offense, and \$1,000 for any subsequent offenses.

Borough employees who violate the new rules may also be subject to consequences meted out under Metuchen's employee policies and procedures.

Signs will be installed to make the new law known to smokers at parks and borough buildings.

The smoking regulations also apply to electronic cigarettes and other vapor smoking devices.

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