

The Maneater

City Council passes Tobacco 21

Hailey Stolze, December 16, 2014

The bill passed 6-1.

Sales of tobacco are now restricted to people over the age of 21 in the city of Columbia.

The Columbia City Council met Dec. 15 in City Hall for public comment and to vote.

The council voted 6-1 to limit tobacco sales to persons over the age of 21. It also passed a law banning the use of electronic cigarettes indoors.

First Ward Councilwoman Ginny Chadwick sponsored the bill known as "Tobacco 21." The Tobacco Free Missouri Organization helped with its creation.

"We are giving over 800 Columbia youth, who will become addicted each year to the most harmful chemical, a chance to live life without a struggle," Chadwick said.

Several citizens voiced concerns at the hearing about loss of tax revenue from limiting the sales of tobacco.

However, Sixth Ward Councilwoman Barbara Hoppe said having fewer Columbians smoke could benefit the city in terms of healthcare costs.

"If we wanted to tax what it costs the community in healthcare costs, we'd have to (tax) 18 dollars per pack," Hoppe said. "What you need to do is think of other ways and other things to sell in your store that will make up for this loss."

Hoppe also argued that when consumed moderately, alcohol could possess some health benefits, while tobacco does not.

Fifth Ward Councilwoman Laura Nauser was the only member of City Council to vote against this ordinance.

"The libertarian in me is going to let liberty and freedom to make choices to consume legal products as an adult override many of the consultants' stories and situations that have come before us today," Nauser said.

Nauser said this ordinance would only ban the sales, not the usage of tobacco in Columbia.

Her main argument against the ordinance was that Americans are affected daily by other sources of unhealthy and addictive products.

“If we’re going to go down this road, then we should look at maybe the sales of sugary beverages,” Nauser said. “There’s many studies now that are coming out that ... they’re looking at (sugar) as an addictive substance. Should we restrict the sales of trans fat because they’re bad for us and our cholesterol? How about salt?”

Chadwick said Columbia is currently under the eyes of the nation because of this ordinance.

“As leaders, we have an opportunity to put Missouri on a different side of the tobacco conversation,” Chadwick said. “Missouri ranks the worst in prevention dollars spent in sales tax and we have one of the highest usage rates of smoking in the nation, meaning more of our loved ones die from tobacco than anywhere else.”

Second Ward Councilman Michael Trapp was one of these Missourians who had a close relative pass away from tobacco usage. His father started smoking at 18 years old. After a lifetime of smoking, he passed away from cardiopulmonary disease.

“He found it a lot easier to pick it up than to put it down,” Trapp said. “Had he started at 21 because that was the law, he would have had an easier time quitting and he may have been able to do that toward the end of his life.”

Third Ward Councilman Karl Skala also experienced a family death related to smoking. His father died from emphysema.

“I can still remember as an infant hearing him cough,” Skala said.

While his father eventually did quit smoking as advised by his doctor, Skala said he had an early and unpleasant death.

“Our primary obligation as a government is the health, safety and welfare of the citizens,” Skala said.

Fourth Ward Councilman Ian Thomas smoked his first cigarette at the age of 14. He said after a decade of smoking fairly regularly, he spent the next several decades struggling to quit.

“I don’t know if there was a law about the age — I think kids just walked into the

tobacco store and bought cigarettes,” Thomas said before the meeting. “I sure wish that they had the law that we’re about to pass tonight for myself and many other people.”

City Council did not say when the law would go into effect.

<http://www.themaneater.com/stories/2014/12/16/city-council-passes-tobacco-21/>