

NorthJersey.com

Hackensack officials torn on raising age to buy tobacco

JANUARY 16, 2015 LAST UPDATED: FRIDAY, JANUARY 16, 2015, 12:31 AM

BY JENNIFER VAZQUEZ

NEWS EDITOR |

HACKENSACK CHRONICLE

HACKENSACK — Council members were torn on raising the age limit to purchase tobacco to 21 as they debated joining other municipalities — including Englewood and Teaneck — in adopting a greater age limit ordinance.

Raising the age limit, which was discussed during the Jan. 6 work session, will further expand the city's restrictions on smoking. In March 2014, Hackensack passed an ordinance prohibiting smoking in city parks and municipal buildings. Deputy Mayor Kathleen Canestrino and Councilman David Sims were concerned that if the measure were approved it could negatively impact local businesses — which could also affect the city's redevelopment efforts.

"We've received, from a number of folks, letters where they feel a lot of people are going to pick up and go elsewhere," Canestrino said.

Though council members were aware of the businesses' concerns, they were vocal on their individual stance on the age limit with Canestrino and Sims saying they had "mixed feelings."

"I certainly do not want to encourage any young people to smoke, but I also think we need to be listening to our business owners as well," Canestrino said.

Mayor John Labrosse said he was against raising the age limit — asserting it is a young adult's right to buy tobacco.

"I feel if you are an adult at 18, you can make your decisions," he said. "You can vote. I know alcohol is 21, but at one point it was 18. I'm a firm believer, and I'm not

condoning the use of cigarettes by anybody, but I believe if you are an adult — you can vote, you can live on your own — it's your right as a citizen of the United States to purchase tobacco."

Council members Leonardo "Leo" Battaglia was in favor of the measure. Though Rose Greenman said it was "a complex situation" she, too, was in favor of raising the age limit.

"While I believe no one should smoke, these are my beliefs, I understand that the business community would like to keep the business coming," Greenman said, adding that other municipalities were faced with the same scenario and chose to institute a greater age limit. Furthermore, she said, that when the idea to outlaw smoking in restaurants was first introduced, many believed it would doom the that industry. However, that has not been the case.

Since a number of municipalities in the area have passed ordinances that raise the legal age to purchase tobacco to 21, Labrosse contends that Hackensack should contact those towns to ask how it impacted the municipalities and businesses.

"What I'd like to do is, I know Englewood has had it for a while and Teaneck just instituted it not that long ago, I would like to check to see impact on some of their businesses," Labrosse said, adding smokers can buy cigarettes in neighboring towns but still smoke in Hackensack, which will not curtail young people from smoking.

Residents and frequent city meeting attendees expressed support for raising the age limit.

"CVS [Pharmacy is] still in business. They are not selling cigarettes," Regina DiPasqua said, referring to the pharmacy chain that stopped selling cigarettes and other tobacco products in its stores. "The businesses will find something else to sell.

"I think it's important [to raise the age] because the younger they start, the longer they'll smoke. I'm a smoker, so I know," DiPasqua continued.

Email: vazquez@northjersey.com

<http://www.northjersey.com/news/officials-torn-on-raising-age-to-buy-tobacco-1.1196388>