



PRINCETON: Local board of health to propose ordinance prohibiting tobacco sales to anyone under 21 (Updated)

By Philip Sean Curran, Staff Writer – The Princeton Packet

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Princeton will seek to become the fourth town in New Jersey to prohibit stores from selling tobacco products and electronic smoking devices to anyone under 21 years old.

The local Board of Health is poised to introduce an ordinance to that effect on March 26. If adopted April 21, Princeton will join Englewood, Sayreville and Teaneck that have the same restriction.

Princeton has a history of passing tough measures against smoking, going back to the early 1990s when it banned vending machines that sold cigarettes. The town prohibits smoking in public parks and recreation facilities and within 35 feet of municipal buildings.

“I think this is the logical next step to address youth smoking,” said Councilwoman Heather H. Howard, the liaison to the board of health, by phone Wednesday. “It’s exciting to be at the forefront again in creating a healthy community.”

Violators would face still-to-be-determined fines if caught selling those products to anyone under 21.

Since 2006, New Jersey law has said tobacco products only can be sold to anyone 19 years old and up. Lawmakers last year introduced legislation to raise that to 21. The measure passed the state Senate by a vote of 22-10, and is pending in the Assembly.

In the meantime, towns are allowed to adopt more restrictive measures if they choose.

Municipal health officer Jeffrey C. Grosser said Tuesday that his office would be responsible for enforcing the ordinance. That will involve sting operations involving under-age purchasers going into stores to see if they can buy tobacco products. His office also plans an education campaign to work with local merchants about the ordinance after it gets approved this spring.

“Given that 90 percent of smokers start before age 21, this will reduce youth initiation and save lives,” Ms. Howard said.

“The great majority of those who use tobacco begin before 21, usually well before 21,” said board of health member Dr. George DiFerdinando Jr. on Wednesday.

Around 7,000 people 18 and younger start smoking each year in New Jersey, he said citing data from The Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. He said tobacco companies spend \$172 million in New Jersey annually in marketing.

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, a public policy organization headquartered in Summit, said at the Board of Health meeting that the tobacco industry targets young adults between 18-21 in their advertising.

At the moment, laws dealing with tobacco sales vary from state to state. In New York City, stores cannot sell tobacco products and electronic cigarettes to anyone under 21. The town of Needham, Massachusetts, was one of the first in the nation to craft that under 21 restriction in 2005, according to information that Ms. Blumenfeld’s organization supplied.

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