

Bergen Record

Editorial: Smoking in Fort Lee

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THE RECORD

THE DELIGHTFUL experience of dining al fresco can be ruined for many people by cigarette or cigar smoke wafting over from another table. The Fort Lee Borough Council recently took steps to stop that, adopting an ordinance to prohibit smoking in outdoor restaurants and cafes.

The new regulation, which covers about a dozen dining establishments, is another key step toward curtailing secondhand smoke. Borough officials say they haven't heard any complaints from restaurant owners. That's really not surprising. Most restaurateurs understand that many patrons who opt to eat outside want fresh air.

New Jersey banned smoking in restaurants and most bars in 2006, but that didn't include outdoor dining areas. The law requires owners to take steps to prevent secondhand smoke from drifting inside the restaurant, but that can be hard to do. A better solution is to do what Fort Lee just did, ban smoking on the premises entirely. Violators can be fined \$250 for a first offense and up to \$1,000 for a third offense.

Fort Lee is the first municipality in Bergen County and likely the second in New Jersey — Passaic is the other — to ban smoking in outdoor areas. However, there is nothing novel about towns trying to control outdoor smoking. A majority of towns in Bergen and Passaic counties ban smoking in parks and recreation areas, according to GASP, or the Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy. Extending the ban to outdoor dining areas is merely a logical extension of that policy.

Critics may see the borough's ordinance as a governmental overreach. We do not. A legitimate goal of government is to protect public health, and this ordinance does that.

Fort Lee's ban is likely to be popular with the public, most of whom do not smoke. Only about 18 percent of adult Americans smoke, according to the American Cancer Society. That's still a lot of people, but it's much lower than in 1965, when 42 percent of adults living in the United States regularly used tobacco products.

Restricting places where people can smoke not only is comfort to non-smokers, it can encourage smokers to stop. Fort Lee's ordinance is a win-win, and it's something officials in other towns should consider emulating.

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