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Tenafly proposes new age limit to [purchase] tobacco products

TENAFLY — The council introduced an ordinance on July 13 to raise the minimum age for purchasing tobacco products from 19 to 21.

"I don't think smoking is a healthy habit," said Mayor Peter Rustin. "If it discourages young people from smoking to a certain degree it is a positive thing."

"I think it's a no-brainer," he added.

Should the ordinance pass, Tenafly will join other municipalities in Bergen County that have raised the age limit, such as Maywood, Teaneck, Englewood and Garfield.

Councilman Mark Zinna cast the only opposing vote.

"I smoke cigars and I think it would be hypocritical to smoke them and then vote saying other people don't have the wherewithal to decide for themselves whether they want to smoke or not," said Zinna.

"If an 18 year old is old enough to understand who to vote for president, join the military and potentially fight and die for their country then they certainly have the maturity to decide if they want to smoke," he added.

"I don't think the government should be telling them what to do in that regard," said Zinna.

The Mayor and Council first heard the proposal to raise the age of sale from Hackensack resident James Erwin at the June 16 meeting.

During the July 13 Mayor and Council meeting, Erwin thanked Rustin for the speed with which the governing body acted.

"When I was here last month I was taken aback – I understand you have time constraints – but to say that you were going to bring it up at the next meeting, that moved me," said Erwin.

During the June 30 work session, New Jersey Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy representative Cara Murphy said studies showed raising the age limit to 21 helps take smoking out of high schools.

Erwin, who is also a member of the NJGASP, has been to multiple municipalities in Bergen County requesting they raise the age limit from 19 to 21.

As he spoke during the June 16 meeting, he also addressed concerns the age limit could affect commerce in the borough.

"I know one of the things that the town has to do is ensure business is successful," Erwin said. "I would declare that there is no business that would go out of business because they are not able to sell cigarettes to 19 and 20 year olds."

He said CVS, which stopped selling tobacco products in September 2014, has had no negative effects due to this decision.

During the June 16 meeting Erwin said he became a member of the effort to raise the age of sale for tobacco products due to the history of cancer-related deaths in his family.

Erwin's father died at the age of 33, when Erwin was born, of pancreatic cancer. He also had two uncles who also died from lung cancer and two uncles who died from prostate cancer.

<http://www.northjersey.com/news/ordinance-raises-age-for-buying-cigarettes-1.1375280>