

Andrew Wyrich, posted July 10, 2015, updated July 10, 2015, at 1:21 AM  
E-mail: [wyrich@northjersey.com](mailto:wyrich@northjersey.com)

## Hillsdale to raise tobacco-buying age

HILLSDALE – The Borough Council is raising the legal age to purchase tobacco in Hillsdale – and may raise it even higher.

The council voted unanimously this week to introduce a change in the borough's current tobacco sales ordinance to raise the required age to purchase cigarettes and similar products from 18 to 19. The ordinance was out of date and had long been superseded by a state law that, in 2006, set the age at 19.

Council President Frank Pizzella, however, said that might not be all of the changes that occur. In 2014, a state Senate bill that would raise the legal age for buying tobacco products to 21 passed through the Senate Health Committee. With New Jersey lawmakers currently attempting to raise the statewide tobacco sales age requirement to 21, Pizzella said, it may be prudent for the borough to simply have its tobacco ordinance state that it would mirror any statewide law.

"I'm sure that there will be some more comments about it, and I think that there are members of the council, including myself, that would want to change the language to say it should match the state law, whatever the state law is. ... It's my intention to do that," he said.

In addition, Pizzella said, the discussion at the council's August 11 meeting could raise the topic of including electronic cigarettes in the borough's ordinance, much like a similar ordinance being crafted in neighboring Westwood.

In June, the Westwood Borough Council rescinded its tobacco ordinance to allow its Board of Health to draft a law that would raise the age to purchase tobacco products from 19 to 21, and would also include e-cigarettes under its umbrella.

"You can't have the conversation about cigarettes if you don't also have the conversation about electronic cigarettes. They sort of go hand in hand," Pizzella said. "It's like having a discussion about beer, but not discussing wine."

Mayor Max Arnowitz said he saw pros and cons to revising Hillsdale's ordinance. While Arnowitz did not believe that the changes in the borough's law would necessarily stop younger residents from picking up the habit, he said that, as a former smoker, he thought the borough should discourage it.

"I don't know how I'm going to react next month," he said, referring to the Aug. 11 meeting. "I mean, we are going to make cigarettes more difficult for people to buy than marijuana. But, if it stops someone who is 18 from picking up smoking, I think it's kind of worth it."

Pizzella said the ordinance could help "create a conversation" about tobacco products among Hillsdale residents.

"I think that we have a responsibility as a government to protect the health and safety of the people," he said. "If anything, [this ordinance] at least brings continued awareness to the subject. All that this does is continue education and awareness and keeps people knowledgeable of what's going on. That in of itself helps people curb the activity."

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