

Hillsdale looks to raise age for tobacco to 21

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HILLSDALE – The Borough Council has introduced an ordinance that would raise the legal age to purchase tobacco products to 21 despite some pushback from local businesses.

If the ordinance is adopted, Hillsdale would join a growing number of municipalities that are restricting tobacco sales to consumers over age 21. The idea for the change grew out of discussions the council has had since July, when it voted unanimously to introduce an ordinance to raise the minimum age to buy tobacco products to 19 from 18.

The council later voted to rewrite the ordinance to include electronic smoking devices and eventually decided to go further by raising the legal age to buy tobacco products to 21.

The final version of the law was brought to the council on Oct. 13. At the meeting, several business owners expressed opposition to the measure.

Sal Risalvato, the executive director of the New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience Store and Automotive Association, said while the intent of the law was good, he thought it would be better if the council were to approve a resolution asking lawmakers in Trenton to raise the legal age statewide.

"There is nobody who would argue that tobacco does not have health effects on people," he said. "However, the ordinance that you are looking to introduce will do absolutely nothing to stop 19- and 20-year-olds from smoking. They will simply purchase their tobacco products in another town."

Risalvato said while tobacco products do not produce high profits, customers who come in to buy cigarettes tend to buy other items, such as coffee, that yield higher profits.

Local convenience store owners have said the law would lower their revenues and that a statewide law would help shield them from losing customers to stores in other towns.

The council did not seem to agree with Risalvato and voted unanimously to introduce the ordinance.

"If every municipality were to pass such an ordinance, maybe Trenton will get the picture and do it also," Councilman Larry Meyerson said. "I think that's the better way of doing it, rather than simply asking Trenton for a resolution. I think that has no teeth whatsoever."

The ordinance will be up for adoption at the council's next meeting, on Nov. 10.

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