

Paramus to consider raising age for buying tobacco

By Melanie Anzidei
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The Paramus Board of Health wants borough officials to raise the age for purchasing tobacco products to 21 from 19.

The board decided at its final meeting of the year that next year it would take up an earlier proposal to raise the minimum age to buy tobacco in the hope of joining a growing list of North Jersey municipalities that have already done so.

In June 2015, borough officials chose to not adopt what supporters refer to as a Tobacco 21 ordinance. At that time, elected officials cited possible litigation because the state's legal age to purchase tobacco products remains at 19.

“Last year when the board had an interest in passing the ordinance, our administration asked that we see if the state would go ahead and pass it as a state law,” Paramus Health Officer-Director Judy Migliaccio said in an email. “It passed the Assembly and Senate but was rejected by the governor. The board felt like it was time to discuss a local ordinance.”

When the local ordinance was last discussed, only nine municipalities had adopted Tobacco 21 ordinances, Migliaccio said at the meeting. Since then, that number has more than doubled. According to tobacco21.org, a website run by the nonprofit Preventing Tobacco Addiction Foundation, 20 municipalities in New Jersey have set the tobacco-buying age at 21, including Fair Lawn as recently as October.

The board unanimously concluded that the ordinance would be a priority next year. It said it could not introduce the ordinance for a first reading this week because a second reading would be scheduled in January. “We can’t have the first reading in one year, and the second reading in another year,” said Migliaccio.

Regardless, the board was unanimous in recommending the ordinance to the mayor and council for 2017.

“You can’t smoke at the high school, so why should we allow them to buy cigarettes when they’re still in high school?” said board member Jean Hegg. “As the Board of Health, it is our duty to maintain the health of the people who live in this town, if not any further, and to join these 20 towns and say Paramus stands behind you.”

Mayor Richard LaBarbiera and Borough Attorney Paul Kaufman did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Tuesday.

“It’s been a year and a half since we last spoke about it, and the Board of Health still feels very strongly that it should be passed,” said Migliaccio. She added that the council “may have a change of heart, too.”

<http://www.northjersey.com/story/news/bergen/paramus/2016/12/20/paramus-board-health-tobacco-age/95673560/>