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Fort Lee May Ban Smoking in All Parks, Discussion to Resume March 20

By Linh Tat, March 9 2014

FORT LEE — The borough may be next to join some 220 municipalities statewide, including 24 in Bergen County, that have outlawed smoking in all parks and recreational areas.

Officials appeared to support the initiative during a presentation Thursday by a group of tobacco-control experts who offered to help draft an ordinance banning people from lighting up in public parks. The mayor and council agreed to continue their discussion at the March 20 meeting.

The borough already restricts smoking in some public spaces. In 1999, it banned smoking in wading areas of public pools. It also prohibited smoking in fenced-in areas of tennis courts in 2011.

Advocates of smoke-free zones say the measures set a healthy example for youths, protect citizens from secondhand smoke and reduce tobacco litter. State law already prohibits smoking in municipal buildings.

Mayor Mark Sokolich, a smoker, said he couldn't think of a reason not to support a comprehensive smoking ban.

"I'm ashamed; I'm part of the 15 percent," he acknowledged, referring to the percentage of New Jersey adults who do smoke.

The campaign to make public parks and recreational areas smoke free has been gaining traction. Global Advisors Smokefree Policy, one of the groups spearheading the effort, has said its goal is to have all 565 municipalities in New Jersey, as well as every county in the state, adopt a 100 percent smoke-free policy.

In Bergen County, municipalities that have signed on to the program are Carlstadt, Cliffside Park, Closter, East Rutherford, Elmwood Park, Franklin Lakes, Garfield, Glen Rock, Hackensack, Little Ferry, Mahwah, Moonachie, Oradell, Palisades Park, Ridgefield, Ridgewood, River Edge, River Vale, Teaneck, Tenafly, Waldwick, Westwood, Wood-Ridge and Wyckoff.

Municipalities decide for themselves whether to ban only traditional cigarettes or to include cigars, e-cigarettes or other nicotine products. Each community also sets its own fines.

Secaucus officials, for example, decided to issue a warning to a first-time offender, a \$25 fine for a second violation and up to \$100 in fines for subsequent offenses. Meanwhile, violators in Hackensack must pay a \$250 fee for the first

offense, \$500 the second time and \$1,000 for each violation thereafter.

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