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Summit Mulls a Smoke-Free Policy

Discussions have begun within the department of community programs but are at the early stages.

- By [John De Bellis](#)
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The department of community programs is leading an effort to ban smoking in public areas, although the extent of a ban is at the early stages of discussion.

According to Summit's Director of Community Programs Judith Leiblein Josephs, Summit is still in the "research phase."

"Over the next six months to a year we will be looking at what others have done and we are researching the pros and cons," Josephs said. "We don't want to be proposing ordinances without understanding the long-term impact."

Chatham Township and Chatham Borough both have no smoking policies in force and have served as a model for neighboring towns.

Josephs said Summit's main considerations are whether to propose a blanket policy or propose the establishment of designated non-smoking areas.

"We have some concerns about every location being 100% smoke free," Josephs said. "There may be someone who wants to go to a remote area and go fishing. What is to say that you cannot go to a remote area and go fishing? Or late at night if you want to take your dog for a walk and you are in a quiet area of a park and you want to have a cigar? We just want to make sure that we protect everybody's rights because the parks belong to the people."

Josephs said that the department of community programs, which manages the family aquatic center and the municipal golf course, maintains smoke-free policies at both locations, although both are under a policy-led prohibition rather than an ordinance.

The line between policy and ordinance only becomes significant when it comes to enforcement, however, and to that extent, Josephs asked, "do I want to put up signs everywhere and expect citizens to police themselves?"

But according to Karen Blumenfeld, the executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, or New Jersey GASP, self-policing works well when there is signage that alerts the public to the existence of a policy.

“For example there aren't police officers and health officers in every bar and yet when you walk-in to a bar an restaurant it's smoke free because people self enforce,” Blumenfeld said. “If there is correct signage then people are aware.”

To help establish a policy, the department of community programs enlisted the GASP 's help to understand the extent of existing legislation and what other municipalities have done in regards to public smoking policy. GASP recently presented to the department of community programs advisory board.

Although discussion about Summit's smoke-free policies are at an early stage, Josephs said that GASP has been invaluable in making the advisory board aware of existing legislation that pertains to the prohibition of smoking in public.

For example, all school related events, even those that take place on public lands and indoor events, are automatically considered smoke free.

“So maybe that's all we need in place,” Josephs said. “These are questions that we are starting to investigate and GASP is very helpful with information.”

Josephs said that once a policy is formulated she anticipates next steps to be bringing a recommendation to the common council.