

The Daily Record

Parsippany May Seek Smokeless Parks

William Westhoven, February 23, 2014

Parsippany-Troy Hills is the latest municipality being targeted by health-advocacy groups — including a township Girl Scout troop — trying to ban smoking in municipal public parks.

Smoking in municipal parks already is banned in a dozen Morris County towns, many Morris County Park facilities and more than 200 New Jersey municipalities. A bill that would ban smoking statewide on beaches, parks and recreation areas was passed unanimously by the New Jersey Assembly Tourism and Gaming Committee on Feb. 20.

The bill (A1080) still needs a Senate sponsor, but its sponsor in the Assembly, Valerie Vainieri Huttel (D-Bergen), said it has bipartisan support and she hopes, “It will be passed in time for us to have smoke-free beaches and parks this summer.”

Moved by a presentation in January by fifth-grade girls from Girl Scout Troop 4383, the Parsippany Township Council is discussing a proposed ordinance that would ban smoking in certain areas of municipal parks. The introduction of a qualified smoking ban by Councilman Michael dePierro on Feb. 4 was tabled due to concerns about targeting spot enforcement in areas designated for children.

“My thought for tabling it was so that it would give us more time to research what other towns with similar bans are doing,” Council President Paul Carifi Jr. said. “I myself do not think that 25 feet from the actual playground areas in the parks is enough. If you have any kind of wind, the smoke will definitely blow into the playground area. Also enforcing the 25-foot mark will be extremely difficult ... I am more in favor of having designated areas for people who choose to smoke that children would not be playing in, such as parking lots.”

Parsippany also has the unique circumstance of owning and operating two municipal golf courses — each with popular banquet facilities — that generate substantial revenue.

“It would kill the Knoll (golf courses),” dePierro said. “A lot of golfers like to smoke while they play, and that includes outings by private groups that might not come here if they cannot smoke. And can you imagine if people (renting banquet halls) could not even go outside to smoke? It would put them out of business.”

Cindy Meakem of the Newton-based Center for Prevention and Counseling said a similar exception was made in Passaic County, which passed a smoking ban in parks but exempted the county golf course.

“They had the same concern (as Parsippany), and we understood,” she said. “We don’t want to put anyone out of business.”

But Karen Blumenfeld, an attorney and executive director of Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy, commonly known as GASP, says Parsippany’s concerns are unwarranted, citing what she says was a successful smoking ban in all Union County recreation facilities, including golf courses.

“And there is existing state law banning smoking in any public recreational facilities used for school-sponsored activities,” Blumenthal said. “If the high school golf teams use the courses, for example (and golf teams from both Parsippany and Parsippany Hills high schools do practice there, according to Knoll management), that would violate the law.”

“As far as the Knoll Country Club, I agree with Mr. dePierro and (want to) keep that the way it is,” Carifi said.

In Morris County, 100-percent smoking bans exist for parks and recreation areas in Butler, Chatham (borough and township), Denville, Hanover, Jefferson, Long Hill, Madison, Mount Arlington, Mount Olive, Pequannock and Rockaway Township.

Morris County bans smoking in all buildings on Park Commission property, vehicles and on the grounds of horticultural sites, specifically Frelinghuysen Arboretum, Willowood Arboretum and Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center.

“More than one-third of our state’s municipal or county jurisdictions have laws that restrict smoking in parks and recreational areas, passing at a rate averaging one ordinance per week,” Blumenfeld said. “Even beach towns like Seaside Park, Long Branch and Sunset Beach in Cape May County have made their beaches 100 percent smoke-free.”

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