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Trenton bans smoking in all parks

By David Foster, The Trentonian

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TRENTON >> People lighting up in the city's parks will do more than just damage their lungs — it will hit them in the pocket book.

City council approved a law Thursday night to ban smoking in all city parks and recreational areas. The measure will prohibit the use of smoking cigars, cigarettes, pipes and electronic smoking devices in the public spaces, and fine violators from \$50 to \$500 depending on the number of offenses.

"This is really important for the health of our residents," Lucy Vandenberg, chair of the Trenton Green Team, advocated at Thursday's meeting. "We support it."

It was the third time in two years the government body considered the measure.

James Brownlee, the city's health director, previously told The Trentonian he addressed city council's enforcement concerns by offering his department to crack down on offenders, instead of the police.

"There have been 171 municipalities that have passed very similar ordinances modeled after a standard to prohibit smoking in parks and recreational areas," Brownlee, who spearheaded the ordinance, previously said. "We have worked with city council to address all of their concerns."

Councilwoman Marge Caldwell-Wilson was the lone official to oppose the measure.

The law gained approval despite no real complaints from residents about people smoking in the parks.

Brownlee admitted to never receiving a call from a resident protesting about someone lighting up in a park.

City activist James Carlucci previously said the city created a "solution looking for a problem."

But public health organizations would disagree.

Dianne Litterer, CEO of the New Jersey Prevention Network, said at Thursday's meeting her organization addresses chronic disease addiction .

"Our state encourages communities to care about their residents in reducing secondhand smoke and discouraging tobacco, which is the No. 1 preventable cause of death," she said. "This important policy

considers the health of the residents in sending a positive message that health is important to all residents of Trenton.”

For smokers, there will some time left to take a few drags before smoking in the parks becomes illegal.

The ordinance will become effective 30 days from Thursday, or 20 days after the mayor signs it into law, whichever comes first.

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Smoking now banned in Trenton parks

smoking ban

In Princeton, New Jersey, a sign outside the Community Park Pool off Witherspoon Street and near the recreation department marks a smoke-free zone. *(Michael Mancuso/The Times)*

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TRENTON — Smokers lighting up a cigarette in any Trenton park can now face fines of up to \$500 after City Council **approved a smoking ban** on Thursday.

Under the policy, the smoking of cigars, cigarettes, pipes and electronic cigarettes is prohibited in city parks, recreational areas, city facilities and inside city vehicles.

Councilwoman Marge Caldwell-Wilson cast the sole no vote.

The areas will now be marked with a sign reading "smoke free zone."

Violators will be subject to fines of between \$50 and \$100 for the first offense, \$100 and \$200 for the second offense and \$200 and \$500 for each subsequent offense.

The city's health department will be tasked with enforcement, but Barbara Sprechman, prevention coalition coordinator at Mercer Council on Alcoholism and Drug Addiction, previously said the ban depends largely on self-enforcement.

"If people see signs, one would hope that they would respond to that by not smoking," she said. "I don't see it as something police are going to enforce or health officers have time to enforce. We want to create these environments and change social norms and community norms by just displaying these signs and hopefully it will take effect."

On Thursday, the ordinance drew support from the city's Green Team, the New Jersey Prevention Network and the Hunterdon and Mercer County Regional Chronic Disease Coalition.

They said the ban would discourage tobacco use, reduce exposure to secondhand smoke and help the city in its Sustainable Jersey certification.

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Trenton's smoking ban a win for the community | Editorial

Times of Trenton Editorial Board By Times of Trenton Editorial Board

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Trenton's leaders are making it harder for smokers to impose their nasty habit on others. Hurray for them.

Thanks to a policy adopted last month, if you fire up a cigarette in any of the city's parks or recreational areas, **you'll be staring at a fine of up to \$500**. Same deal if you smoke in any city facility or city-owned vehicle.

Does this sound draconian? Not compared with the toll that smoking takes on human lungs.

"Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death in this country, and everyone is well aware of the dangers of second-hand smoke in this day and age," state Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle (D-Bergen) said in September.

Vainieri Huttle was responding to news that Gov. Chris Christie had vetoed a highly popular bill that would have banned smoking in public parks and limited lighting up at the state's public beaches.

Environmentalists and anti-smoking advocates had lauded the bill, saying it would cut down on second-hand smoke, reduce litter and reduce the threat of fires.

Despite the governor's nod to Big Tobacco, New Jersey has a well-earned reputation for being tough on smoking. The state banned smoking in indoor public places in 2006, and raised the age that residents can buy tobacco from 18 to 19 – both significant health-saving measures.

Trenton's new ordinance, which was overwhelmingly approved with only one "no" vote, applies to anyone smoking cigars, cigarettes, pipes and electronic cigarettes.

Violators will be subject to fines of between \$50 and \$100 for a first offense, with the fees ranging upwards from there for subsequent offenses.

Designated areas will carry signs reading "Smoke-free zone," and the city's health department will be in charge of enforcing the policy.

Smokers and tobacco merchants are going to gripe – you can bet the house on it. Cries of "Nanny state!" will fly. But evidence of the damage inflicted on the environment by smokers is irrefutable, and the sight of cigarette butts and used matches despoiling otherwise lovely parks is downright disgusting.

Trenton is far from alone in protecting its parks from the devastation that smoking inflicts. In the past year alone, Bogota, Millburn, Belleville, Allendale, Franklin Lakes and Metuchen were among municipalities enacting bans,

joining the ranks of dozens of others already so committed.

We sympathize with smokers, we really do. But their right to indulge their habit/addiction ends where park-goers' right to health begins.

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