

**Community Partner in Orange County helps get Smoke Free Parks ordinance**

## **Middletown OKs strict public anti-smoking rule**

### **Aim: reducing second hand smoke**

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MIDDLETOWN — The Middletown City Council unanimously passed one of the toughest anti-smoking resolutions in the region Monday evening.

The resolution prohibits people from lighting up at all city playgrounds and pools, as well as two entire city parks mainly used by children and teenagers.

The resolution, viewed by the council as a measure to protect public health, is intended to reduce the exposure of kids to second-hand smoke.

Port Jervis passed a similar resolution in the spring. Port Jervis Mayor Russ Potter says the city didn't include penalties, however, and the resolution was being enforced on a voluntary level. Middletown's resolution attaches penalties — fines and jail terms — but the penalties are designed for repeat offenders, city officials say.

The resolution is supported by the Orange County Health Department and POW'R Against Tobacco, a state-funded group working to reduce tobacco use.

Having tobacco-free parks, beaches, playgrounds and pools in New York state is one of POW'R goals, says Meghan DuBois O'Connor, the Orange County coordinator for POW'R. The organization will provide the no-smoking signs for the parks in Middletown.

**In addition, the smoking ban is supported by the American Cancer Society and the American Lung Association.**

Middletown is a target for the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Healthy Communities Program, which is being implemented through the Orange County Health Department. This program also is working to reduce tobacco exposure.

"I think this is something that is long overdue," said Middletown Alderman Ashok Sabnis. And Alderman Miguel Rodrigues went as far to say — half-joking — he would chase people in the park who were smoking.

Smokers, by and large, weren't so enthusiastic.

“With all the taxes we pay (on cigarettes) to the state, it seems like we should be allowed to smoke in a public space,” Raymond Glover said in Thrall Park on Monday.

Similarly, Will Hasbrouck, also in Thrall Park, said that public parks would seem like a less-welcoming space for smokers. “Nobody’s going to want to have a picnic if they can’t smoke,” he said.

But even among smokers, the idea of keeping tobacco away from children had support. Smoker Debora Ramnath, who had taken her three children to Francher-Davidge Park on Tuesday, said the ban for playgrounds was a good idea. “I never smoke around my kids,” she added.  
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