

Published Friday, August 10, 2007 10:15 PM PDT

Politics

City inches toward smoking ban

Ordinance with tougher penalties against retailers is seen as transition to more sweeping laws.

By Jason Wells

GLENDALE — An ordinance requiring store owners to have a city permit to sell tobacco products is nearly complete and promises to light up a grass-roots movement for a citywide smoking ban.

The new permit would be in addition to the state license vendors must have and is meant to cut down on tobacco sales to minors. This comes after a 2006 study that found 24% of Glendale retailers were "ready and willing" to sell cigarettes and similar products to children under 18.

Tobacco retailers would be required to pay a proposed \$250 annual fee to maintain the permit, which could be revoked if retailers are caught three times in five years selling to minors, according to the licensing ordinance, which is scheduled to go before the City Council on Aug. 28.

The ordinance represents two years of coordination between a coalition of health and youth advocates, the city, local hospitals and business owners, said Guadulesa Rivera, community advocate for Glendale Adventist Medical Center, which has devoted thousands of dollars toward studying the issue and developing the proposal.

Several local liquor store owners, who would be affected by the ordinance, said they support efforts to curtail tobacco sales to minors and hope to have continued input on the ordinance.

"Sometimes your employees make a mistake," said Frank Chong, owner of Castle Liquors on San Fernando Road. "I'm OK with fees, but penalty fee, that's the main thing I'm concerned about."

The city's Neighborhood Services Department has gathered input from tobacco retailers since it started developing the ordinance, Rivera said.

"I don't see other cities going to this effort," she said. "I think a lot of people are rallying around this effort."

As the ordinance gets closer to a vote, more people are saying they would like the city to move closer to a citywide restriction on smoking in shared public spaces.

"Everyone knows minors shouldn't smoke, but the city seems to be dragging its feet when it comes to everyone else's health," resident Carol Sloane said Friday as she grabbed lunch on Brand Boulevard. "All the other cities are banning smoke, so what's the deal with us?"

In May, Burbank banned smoking in outdoor dining areas, parts of downtown Burbank, the Chandler Bikeway, city parks and facilities, public transit stations and at outdoor events.

Smoking in Los Angeles parks will be banned as of Sept. 17 after the City Council cited public health concerns and worries about fire danger.

Several cities in Los Angeles County have some level of smoking ban, but in Glendale some said restricting adult smokers may be a challenge.

"It might be a little bit of an uphill battle," said Tammi Reylea, who is a member of the MOMS Club of Northwest Glendale.

But Reylea and others are hoping to build a slow, steady movement with an online petition to pressure the City Council to take up a smoking ban at least as restrictive as Los Angeles'.

About 120 people have signed the online petition for the "No Butts Glendale" campaign so far, she said.

"I know things don't happen overnight," Reylea said.

Glendale already prohibits smoking within 25 feet of park playgrounds and entrances to public buildings.

But violators of those restrictions often float under the radar amid more pressing public safety issues for city officials, Rivera said.

"People are finding that tobacco laws are difficult to enforce," she said, especially for park users who may be annoyed by the smoke but either don't have a measuring tape or the confidence to approach a smoker.

"It's hard to go up to strangers and enforce rules yourself," she said.

That's why an all-out, curb-to-curb ban, like the one in Los Angeles, would be easiest, she said.

Russell Hauk, the city's Park Ranger supervisor, said his department receives very few complaints about violations.

"It's a periodic issue," he said.

Even fewer complaints come into the city's Neighborhood Services Department, Director Sam Engel said.

That's because most smokers are mindful of those around them, despite the unfair image nonsmokers promote, said Shannon Marquez, 19.

As she stood outside a movie theater on Maryland Avenue with a cigarette, Marquez said she never throws her cigarette butts on the ground or lights up around young children.

"I don't need the city telling me how to be me," she said.

Despite the awkward moments residents face in trying to enforce an invisible 25-foot barrier, many proponents of a citywide ban agreed that every new restriction or oversight from the city was a step in the right direction.

"The movement is inspiring so quickly," Rivera said.

There are signs the ordinance may set off the sort of discussion smoking-ban proponents have been waiting for inside City Council chambers.

Mayor Ara Najarian, who in the past has resisted the idea of an all-out ban, said on Friday that he would consider introducing the option as a discussion item after fielding several calls and e-mails from smokers in support of a ban.

"I initially thought a smoking ban would be too restrictive and that smokers would take issue with that," he said.

But after the recent endorsements from smokers who said a ban would encourage them to quit, Najarian said he was now willing to rethink it.

"Clearly, the nonsmoking community is going to be in big support of it," he said.

After the council hears the tobacco retailer licensing ordinance, Najarian said it might be a good time to talk about a smoking ban, while the issue is fresh in people's minds.

QUESTION

What do you think of the suggestion of an all-out smoking ban in Glendale? E-mail gnp@latimes.com or write to News-Press Community Forum, 221 N. Brand Blvd., 2nd Floor, Glendale, CA 91203. Please include your name and hometown and phone number for verification purposes only.

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