

Woodridge eyes strict smoking ban

By Don Grigas

Staff writer

No butts about it, Woodridge is drafting one of the strictest smoking ban ordinances in the Chicago area -- legislation that would prohibit smoking everywhere but private dwellings and tobacco stores.

During a Feb. 1 workshop to discuss elements of a smoking ban, trustees agreed exemptions should be kept to a minimum.

"The consensus seems to be that there be very few, if any, exemptions to the smoking ban ordinance," Mayor William Murphy said following the workshop.

The village attorney is drafting an ordinance expected to be adopted Thursday, March 15, and effective Sunday, July 1, Murphy said.

"That should give us ample time to educate the public and businesses about the ban," Murphy said.

The draft ordinance will be published on the village Web site within the next few weeks so residents can view it before a Thursday, March 1, public hearing on the issue, Murphy said.

Trustees agreed to ban smoking in outdoor areas, hotels, bowling alleys, enclosed bar areas inside restaurants, restaurants, private clubs and nursing homes.

Currently Woodridge has no hotels or nursing homes, but trustees agreed that smoking should be banned in those types of businesses in the event those businesses are developed in town.

"It should be a total ban with no exemptions," said Trustee Robert Brandt, who has been a vocal proponent of a smoking ban.

Even if a theater production --indoor or outdoors -- called for someone to light up on stage as part of the performance, lighting a cigarette or a cigar would be prohibited.

"If they are actors, let them act like they are smoking," Brandt said. "We are taking a very aggressive approach, and I would hope other communities would come on board and implement bans as well."

According to Smoke Free DuPage, a task force that has urged municipalities to ban smoking, existing bans in several Chicago area communities allow a variety of exemptions ranging from open-air dining and hotels to nursing homes.

Woodridge's ordinance would allow the fewest exemptions of the 23 listed

in a Smoke Free DuPage tool kit distributed to other DuPage County municipalities.

Only one other municipality listed in the tool kit -- Lake Forest -- allows as few as two exemptions, for private residences and nursing homes.

Murphy said the ordinance will not affect outdoor events on property owned by the Woodridge Park District, which is considering legislation of its own.

Details such as establishing a schedule of fines and public education still need to be worked out, but Murphy said they will be done in "ample time to let the public know."

The Woodridge Area Chamber of Commerce also will be encouraged to provide input, officials said.

Woodridge police will be responsible for writing citations for violations, but Police Chief Steven Herron said "patrons and businesses are the keys to enforcing the ban."

"We cannot be out there checking all businesses as a routine," Herron said, "and we expect the majority of businesses and their patrons will police themselves.

"Without their help it will be very difficult to enforce."

A portion of fines could be set aside for cancer research or a cancer organization, trustees said.

Woodridge has considered a smoking ban since September 2005, but decided to wait until either the state or other municipal organizations supported such a measure before moving forward independently.

Recently DuPage County urged communities to enact smoke-free ordinances, and supplied data and model ordinances supporting a smoking ban.

The state also is considering legislation banning smoking in public places, effective in 2008, and several communities in the Chicago area already have enacted smoking ban ordinances.

A Chicago ban will not take effect in bars, restaurants and taverns until July 1, 2008, a year later than the proposed Woodridge ordinance.