

District waits on outdoor smoking ban

By Don Grigas
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Woodridge Park District officials say they will consider allowing smoking in restricted areas of outdoor park grounds used for organized family functions, corporate outings and special events.

But before trustees vote on the issue they want more direction from village of Woodridge officials.

"We need to get some clarification from the village on a few things," said Mike Adams, director of the Park District at the Feb. 13 Park Board meeting.

The village is drafting its own smoking ban ordinance that would prohibit smoking within the corporate limits of Woodridge with two exemptions: private dwellings and tobacco shops.

One of the banned areas mentioned in the village's ordinance is "outdoor areas," which could be interpreted to mean all outdoor parks and golf courses, park officials said.

"We need to get the definition of 'outdoor areas' because the village also seems to indicate park property is exempt and they want us to enact our own ordinance," Adams said.

One concern was whether the village's ordinance would supersede any potential exemptions granted by the Park District because Park District property lies within village boundaries.

"If the village's ordinance supersedes ours, why do we have to draft our own (ordinance)?" said Fred Hohnke, president of the Park Board.

Adams said he will contact the village for clarification prior to a Thursday, March 1, public hearing at Village Hall.

The village plans to adopt its ordinance Thursday, March 15, with a target date of Sunday, July 1, for implementation and enforcement of the proposed ban.

Mayor Bill Murphy said the village expects the Park District to adopt its own ordinance governing parks and other outdoor properties owned by the district.

"The village's intent, I believe, is to allow the Park District to make their own decision regarding a smoking ordinance separate from the village's ordinance," Murphy said. "Their ordinance would be applicable to parcels owned by the Park District."

Because the two public golf courses within the village limits — Seven Bridges and Village Greens — are owned by the village, the proposed village ordinance would apply to both courses, Murphy said.

The Park District manages Village Greens for the village.

"But we will consult with our attorneys to see how that affects outdoor areas as specified in our recent discussions," Murphy said.

During Tuesday's Park Board meeting trustees and staff discussed the possibility of creating their own ordinance, and Adams said a letter will be drafted and sent to village officials within the next week seeking direction on the proposed smoking ban.

While park officials agreed second-hand smoke is unhealthy and should not be allowed near children and spectators at such venues as soccer games, baseball games and playgrounds where children congregate, some trustees suggested exemptions might be in order.

"You don't want it around children or those who are really bothered by (smoke). But how would this impact special events like the annual jubilee, movies in the park and picnics and parties at places like Castaldo Park?" Hohnke said.

"Many of the veterans who attend the jubilee enjoy having a smoke with their beer. ... Whose going to tell them they can't smoke there?"