

Public speaks out against smoking ban

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WOODRIDGE, IL -

Woodridge officials will sniff out what's in area communities before adopting a smoking ban in the village.

After conducting a public hearing March 1 and soliciting comments from more than 200 residents via the telephone over the last three weeks, Woodridge officials say they will conduct one more informal survey of surrounding communities and their plans for smoking legislation before moving forward.

The village has been discussing a potential smoking ban ordinance for several months, and could approve one within the next month with a target date of Sunday, July 1, for implementation.

The draft ordinance being considered in Woodridge is one of the most restrictive among Illinois communities.

Recently some Woodridge business owners and the Woodridge Area Chamber of Commerce voiced concerns that a municipal ban on smoking would put some Woodridge businesses at a disadvantage because some neighboring communities such as Bolingbrook are not in the act of adopting similar ordinances.

"I do think our original intent was to coordinate our efforts regionally, and I will be calling mayors in area towns to see what they are going to do before we sit down as a board and debate the issue and put it to a final vote," said William Murphy, mayor of Woodridge.

Murphy's comments came after the March 1 public hearing in which 20 people spoke out in opposition to the draft ordinance Woodridge is considering. One person supported the smoking ban during the public hearing.

More than 50 people attended the hearing.

Murphy said the Village Board will discuss the proposal at the next board workshop scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 15. The board is not expected to vote on the smoking ban until April at the earliest, Murphy said.

"We do need to see what kind of timetable the other communities are on," Murphy said. "There will be no action taken on March 15."

Many communities in DuPage County have initiated discussions on smoking ban ordinances over the last year, and are in various stages of enacting smoking ban ordinances.

The lack of consistency from one town to another has some Woodridge businesses concerned.

"Many of my customers I have talked with tell me they will go to Bolingbrook establishments if the smoking ban is enacted here and not there," said Rich Moore, owner of Shanahan's, a Woodridge bar that allows smoking in its enclosed bar area but not in its restaurant.

"A significant portion of our patrons do smoke, and for us to lose 20 percent of our business would have a tremendous impact on us," Moore said. "We would have to reduce our staff to make up for that."

Moore urged trustees to consider delaying the ordinance until the state enacts its own, or make an exemption for

businesses like his that would limit smoking to certain hours of operation.

Kiersten Regelin, president of the Woodridge Area Chamber of Commerce, said “surrounding communities are not in the same time table. ... We ask you to hold off” on a smoking ordinance.

Several of those who voiced opposition to the ban at the public hearing either were patrons of Shanahan’s or were employed there.

Many said they know smoking is unhealthy, but stated freedom of choice is important, and a ban would unfairly target smokers.

Some said they would comply with a state ban if one were enacted.

John Augustine, a Burr Ridge resident who manages a legal research firm and is president of the Kiwanis Club of Woodridge, said a municipal ban “is not appropriate in this case” and is opposed to it.

“This is a county or state issue ... an issue of economic responsibility,” Augustine said.

Phil Labak, of Woodridge, said he opposed the ban for philosophical reasons.

“By doing this government is saying they know better than we do as individuals how to care for ourselves. ... We are too dumb to make the decision ourselves,” Labak said.

“When government takes away our choices the act is a move towards socialism,” Labak said.

Donna Ruyter, 2347 Sunnysdale Drive, Woodridge, works at Shanahan’s and has lived in Woodridge since 1984. She is a single mother of three children.

“I don’t smoke, but I am angry at this proposed ordinance. Both sides have rights. I choose to work in this (smoking) environment.

“Who will be there if my job is lost?... I am totally against this ban,” Ruyter said.

Ted Bulthaup, owner of Hollywood Boulevard Theaters in Woodridge, said “even a 10 percent loss of patrons from a smoking ban would be catastrophic to my business.”

Smoking is allowed at the theater in a designated portion of the lobby, and “my public embraces it,” Bulthaup said.

“If we don’t give the public what they want they will drive somewhere else,” Bulthaup said.

The Woodridge Park District currently is examining its own smoking ban ordinance, and is not included in the village draft ordinance.

“The village is allowing the (Woodridge) Park District to make the choice for themselves,” Bulthaup said. “I’d like to have the same rights as the Park District to make the choice. ... Let me run my own business.”