

Woodridge to focus on indoor smoking ban

By Don Grigas

Staff writer

If Woodridge eventually enacts a smoking ban, it initially will target indoor venues -- including restaurants and bowling alleys -- before taking aim at outdoor venues.

During a June 1 workshop, the Village Board directed staff members to gather more information about smoking ban legislation and to focus only on indoor venues.

The village also will include a question about a possible smoking ban on an upcoming community needs survey scheduled to be mailed to about 1,200 residents in July.

"Initially, when we discussed this in the past, the focus was on restaurants and entertainment, and we should continue to focus on that," Mayor William Murphy said. "We don't want to get beyond what the state wants to ban, so we should stay more narrowly focused."

The workshop came eight days after Murphy convened a regional meeting of representatives from 11 surrounding communities to discuss the issue. The communities all are members in the DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference, a non-legislative council of municipalities that addresses public policy issues.

"We need to get some idea from our board how far down the rope they want us to go with our efforts," Assistant Village Administrator Peg Halik said.

Most trustees agreed the village should look at indoor venues, unless state or county legislators enact broader legislation restricting people from smoking at outdoor public places like parks.

"Moving smokers from indoors to outdoors at least is a progression," Village Trustee Robert Brandt said. "If not now, we can always move forward as we go."

Brandt has been the most vocal proponent of an overall smoking ban. He continues to call for a ban on smoking in all public areas, indoors and outdoors.

"You see it (smoking) outdoors at free concerts and events, which are magnets for kids. We don't want our kids to see it at public parks. ... Hopefully the Woodridge Park District will step up and address the issue," Brandt said. "(For the Park District), it is not a revenue issue."

By state statute smoking is not allowed inside public Park District facilities, but smoking is allowed at outdoor venues like soccer and baseball games, said Mike Adams, director of the Woodridge Park District.

"The Park District has no formal smoking policy in place at this time, but we are examining it," Adams said. "State law prohibits smoking inside public buildings, so there is no smoking in our buildings, as well as inside the pool facilities. At outdoor events and programs we encourage people not to smoke, but there is no way we can enforce it."

The board also may seek additional input from the Woodridge-area business community.

"I am a little disappointed we didn't get more feedback from the business community before this," Village Trustee John Curran said.

The Woodridge Area Chamber of Commerce conducted a survey of area businesses a few months ago when trustees discussed a smoking ban, but only a handful responded.

In that survey one of the fears expressed by Woodridge business owners was the threat that businesses in other nearby communities that allow smoking could gain an unfair advantage over Woodridge businesses if Woodridge were to adopt a ban.

"The biggest competitor Woodridge has for the entertainment dollar regionally is Bolingbrook, and they do not have a ban," Curran said.

Halik said Bolingbrook "is not interested in having that discussion at this time."

Bolingbrook Mayor Roger Claar said "it (smoking ban legislation) is a state initiative, and we are waiting to see what they do."

No time frame was discussed for drafting a municipal ordinance, although the board likely will not act until it receives public input from the survey, which won't be tabulated until late summer at the earliest.

Many local municipalities including Chicago have strengthened smoking ban ordinances, with Chicago adopting a ban in January prohibiting smoking in almost all public places, with some exceptions. Restaurants there must comply by July 1, 2008.