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Pools, playground in Schenectady now smoke-free areas

By Kathleen Moore

SCHENECTADY — Smoking has now been banned at all of the city's pools and Central Park's playground for young children.

The Schenectady City Council agreed Monday to a smoking ban that may be extended to the city's other playgrounds by the end of the summer.

"Let's start with Tiny Tots Land and the pools and revisit it as we go forward in the season," said Councilman Mark Blanchfield, who proposed the ban.

For now, smokers must snuff out their cigarettes at Tiny Tots Land in Central Park as well as the city's outdoor pools at Hillhurst, Quackenbush and Front Street. Blanchfield had discussed banning smoking in every playground. But when the issue came before the council, some members hesitated, saying they were afraid it would be impossible to enforce the ban and difficult to delineate restricted areas in playgrounds.

Blanchfield argued that police enforcement wouldn't be needed. He said most smokers would obey signs telling them not to smoke near playgrounds.

"Let's phase it in with signs, see if smokers obey," he said.

The Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition has offered to provide the signs, which would read in part, "Young Lungs At Play."

Coalition Project Coordinator Jeanie Orr told the council that smokers have generally obeyed the signs in other cities.

"The signage really makes a big difference," she said. "Most smokers are very good about that. And as a mother, if there was a sign, I'd feel much more comfortable saying, 'Oh, can you move away? This is a no-smoking area.'"

One pool had a ban last year. Although the council didn't know about it, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Schenectady banned smoking at Quackenbush Pool last summer when they ran the facility. Officials told the city council that smokers gave them no trouble when they were told to put out their cigarettes.

But Councilwoman Denise Brucker said she didn't want police to have to track down smokers on top of everything else they do.

"Is there a way to do this without creating a law for it? That would take enforcement right off the table," she said. "Limit it to Tiny Tots Land and the pools."

Councilman Gary McCarthy added that the resolution was "feel-good legislation."

Councilman Joseph Allen said he doesn't want smokers to end up being kicked out of the parks altogether.

"I don't want to ban it in the parks. But play areas — but all means they should not be smoking in Tiny Tots Land or any other play areas in the city," Allen said.

Blanchfield said Tiny Tots Land would be a perfect place to start, since it is fenced, unlike many of the city's playgrounds, and caters to the city's youngest children.

"It's so directed to kids who are 5 and under," Blanchfield said. "Let's start with Tiny Tots Land and see the reaction."