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Conway puts off vote on smoking

City Council considers alternatives to full ban

By Tonya Root

The Sun News

City Council members did not make a definite decision Monday on a proposed smoking ban, but without voting, they said they did not support an outright ban of smoking in businesses.

Instead, officials discussed a voluntary ban and a law to prevent smoking on city-owned property.

The ban will be discussed at a later date, which has not been set, council members said.

It was standing room only during Monday's council meeting, with many interested in the smoking ban.

Among them were some supporters who traveled from Columbia and Charleston.

Barbara Blain-Olds, assistant city administrator, provided City Council with four options for the proposed smoking ban:

Postponing the decision to wait for a Supreme Court ruling expected in early 2008

Invoke a partial ban and set an example to area businesses by banning smoking on all city-owned property

Implement a voluntary ban to discourage smoking in public places that would allow each

business owner to decide for their business

Create a city-wide ban on smoking.

City Councilman Tom Anderson, who proposed the idea of a ban, said he was pleased that attention is being focused on the issue.

He suggested putting the issue on a ballot as a referendum to see what residents think of the idea.

"Government is for the people and by the people," Anderson said.

"The lawsuits don't scare me. We're not looking for a fight."

Councilman Irby Koon, who previously smoked for 35 years, suggested the Conway Area Chamber of Commerce survey its members to see how people in the town feel about the issue. In the meantime, he suggested providing signs that denote a smoke-free building for any business interested.

"I don't know if we can cut the head off the turkey without, pardon the pun, ruffling some feathers," Koon said.

"We don't need to go too fast too soon."

Councilwoman Vivian Chestnut said she wants to hear from business owners about how they feel on the issue.

"I don't think we have the right to tell a business you can or cannot do something," Chestnut said.

Two business owners attended Monday's meeting and spoke against the ban because they said it would damage their businesses.

John Cherry, owner of Kimberly's Bar and Grill, said 75 percent of his customers are smokers and to ban them would mean a loss of their business.

"If there was a ban here it would put us out of business. They're going to go somewhere else. You're going to push them to other areas," Cherry said.

"This town was founded on tobacco, we all know that."

Those in support of the ban cited health reasons for those exposed to secondhand smoke such as hospitality workers who work in the bars and restaurants where smoking is prevalent.

Tony Alberg, a professor with the Medical University of South Carolina, told officials of the dangers of secondhand smoke on workers.

"There's no safe level of secondhand smoke," Alberg said.

"The health effects are real and substantial."

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