



Posted on Mon, Jul. 09, 2007

Area towns ponder smoking bans

By Tonya Root
The Sun News

Two Grand Strand towns could soon follow the precedent set by a Lowcountry town and Upstate city when they review ordinances to ban smoking in public places.

The Surfside Beach Town Council tonight will consider a smoking ban as proposed by Councilwoman Judy Tuttle.

Conway officials are researching an ordinance to ban smoking after Councilman Tom Anderson proposed the idea in June. The Conway council will meet again July 23.

"The town's attorney is preparing an ordinance to be presented [tonight]," Tuttle said Friday. "The response has been overwhelming pro, and the community is very supportive as a majority."

Surfside Beach and Conway are the only area towns considering such a ban at the moment, but leaders in other communities say they are following the topic and that it could be introduced in Brunswick and Georgetown counties.

Such bans have been passed in about 15 communities in South Carolina.

Figures for North Carolina were not available.

The trend toward smoke-free restaurants, bars and other public places began about 30 years ago in Berkeley, Calif., and has spread across the nation. Twenty-two states and 577 municipalities have enacted smoke-free laws that cover more than half of residents in the U.S., according to Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights.

"The movement for smoke-free air has gone from being a California oddity to the nationwide norm," said Bronson Frick, the group's associate director. "We think 100 percent of Americans will live in smoke-free jurisdictions within a few years."

Georgetown City Administrator Steve Thomas said there's been no formal discussion about smoking bans during his two years with the city, but he doesn't rule it out as a possibility.

Brunswick County Manager Marty Lawing also said county officials have not discussed a ban, but 34 restaurants are listed on the county's Web site as being smoke-free. They included locally owned businesses and chain restaurants, such as KFC, Hardees and Bojangles'.

"It may be something we look at in the future," Lawing said Friday. "It has not been an initiative or priority at this time."

"It's not about an individual's right to smoke or not smoke," Tuttle said. "The issue is clean air, providing and protecting our citizens."

But the idea doesn't sit well with some residents.

Evan Bofilios, owner of Golden Egg in Surfside Beach, said he supports a ban only if all businesses are equal in the ban.

Bofilios, who fears competition from those who don't ban smoking in their establishments, said he does not like the idea of controlling what someone does while outside a business or their home.

"The way they want to propose it I don't like it. If the restaurant down the street is non-smoking, I'll be non-smoking," Bofilios said. "But for them to be telling people outside and at the beach [not to smoke] that's extreme. If you're enclosed that's different. People are more conscious than they were 10 years ago."

Bofilios has a smoking area inside his restaurant and has seen that section change in recent years.

"I've noticed the trend people used to say we don't care where we sit, but now they're more concerned," Bofilios said. "If you have a non-smoking restaurant and someone wants to step outside and smoke, why stop them from that. I don't smoke, but your house, your air."

Local officials are following state trends to ban smoking in public places after the town of Sullivans Island in Charleston County passed an ordinance about 18 months ago.

That ordinance is being challenged in the state Supreme Court by a local bar owner after a local judge there ruled in favor of the island government, saying they had such authority, said Howard Duvall, executive director of the Municipal Association of South Carolina.

Many towns and counties are watching for the outcome of that case before tackling the issue, Duvall said. Greenville officials also passed a ban, but a judge there ruled they did not have such authority.

"We are encouraging the cities to pass these ordinances. We think it's a public health issue and a quality of life issue," Duvall said. "I think a lot of city and county councils are looking at the issue and trying to decide if they should go ahead and act. I know several of the restaurants felt like they were doing better with a smoke-free environment and picking up more customers."

The effect on businesses varies, especially if the ban is in a city close to other areas where smoking is permitted, said Tom Sponseller, president of The Hospitality Association of South Carolina.

"The industry does not like them when they're done on a city-by-city basis because it creates a competition," said Sponseller, who described how businesses on Sullivans Island reported customers driving four miles to Mount Pleasant where smoking is permitted.

"When they're done locally, a smoking customer and their friends have the option of going somewhere else. Typically, it will tend to impact bars more than restaurants."

Contact TONYA ROOT at 397-7962 or troot@thesunnews.com.

© 2007 MyrtleBeachOnline.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.myrtlebeachonline.com>