



Posted on Tue, Jul. 10, 2007

Smoking ban gets first nod

By Jonathan Tressler
The Sun News

Surfside Beach Town Council on Monday night gave initial approval to an ordinance that would outlaw smoking in public buildings.

The measure, introduced by Councilwoman Judy Tuttle in April, passed by a 4-3 vote.

The ordinance requires two votes to be final. Council will vote again on July 24.

The issue took center stage during the public comments Monday, with speakers apparently split on their support of the proposal.

Mayor Roy Hyman called the ordinance an attack on people's rights.

"I don't support this for the simple reason of taking rights away from people who spent money and built buildings to have their own businesses," Hyman said. "I do not feel it's my obligation to tell people they cannot have people smoke in their own buildings. I'm not for smoking, but I am for the public making their own choices in their own buildings, and I am not going to vote to stop people from doing what they enjoy in Surfside Beach."

Tuttle argued it's a matter of health and not about abridging people's freedoms.

She said of particular concern to her is the health of employees at establishments that permit smoking inside, such as waiters, waitresses and other service industry workers who spend hours around secondhand smoke.

"This is not about constitutional rights. It's about protecting those who have no choice. Everyone does have a right to clean air," Tuttle said. "There have been increased health care costs and there have been employee absentee rate increases associated with smoking."

Officials in Conway also are considering a ban on public smoking after councilman Tom Anderson proposed the idea in June.

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

Sullivan's Island in Charleston County was the first S.C. municipality to enact an ordinance banning public smoking. It went into effect May 16, 2006.

Other S.C. towns and counties with similar ordinances include Liberty, Beaufort County, Bluffton, Charleston, Aiken County, Hilton Head Island and Mount Pleasant, according to the Smoke Free Action Network.

The state Supreme Court is deciding on smoking ordinances for Greenville and Columbia, the Charleston-based anti-public smoking group reports.

Surfside Beach Town Council members Joe Martin, Sammy Truett and Doug Samples joined Tuttle on Monday night in support of the ordinance. Hyman, Becky Hyatt and Bill McKown opposed.

Contact JONATHAN TRESSLER at 444-1723 or jtressler@thesunnews.com.

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