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## Surfside council nears final vote on smoking ban

By Jonathan Tressler  
The Sun News

Surfside Beach Town Council plans today to take a final vote on a controversial ordinance that could ban smoking in public buildings in the small town.

The measure, introduced in April by Councilwoman Judy Tuttle, passed its first reading two weeks ago after a flurry of public comment by both opponents and proponents of the ordinance.

Council members on both sides of the matter expect the issue, which has taken center stage in recent weeks, to attract a hearty crowd.

"I would say, based on the last meeting, it will be at least as large, if not larger," said Councilman Joseph P. Martin, who said there were "easily 100" concerned citizens at the July 10 meeting.

If the measure passes second reading, council members will decide when it will be implemented.

The crux of the issue for council members seems to be whether the town has the right to dictate where people can smoke as long as it's legal to buy tobacco products, and whether business owners should be forced to tell their clientele they can't light up in establishments where people are accustomed to smoking.

"I voted against it for a couple of reasons," said town Councilman Bill McKown. "One of my concerns is that the federal and state government allow cigarettes to be purchased legally. How, then, could it be legal to purchase them but not to smoke?"

Tuttle said the issue has more to do with people's right to clean air than with smokers' rights. She cited people who work in smoke-rich environments like bartenders and waitstaff at smoke-friendly restaurants, who depend on their jobs but are exposed to secondhand smoke as a consequence.

"Those people are the ones affected that don't have a choice, and that's part of what government does," she said about limiting their exposure to smoke.

Tuttle said, if passed, once the measure takes effect, violators will likely receive a "courtesy warning," then be subject to stiffer penalties. Those penalties could be on par with what a minor traffic ticket would yield, she said.

A similar measure in Conway was debated for the first time last night at the city's council meeting. No action was taken.

The two municipalities would be the first to enact anti-public smoking ordinances in Horry County.

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