

Teaneck bans tobacco sales to people under 21

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BY AARON MORRISON
STAFF WRITER | THE RECORD

TEANECK — The township this week became the third municipality in the state to ban the sale of cigarettes and other tobacco products to people under age 21, and news of the ban drew rebuke Thursday from a state lobby group for convenience store owners.

Passage of the measure was not unanimous during Wednesday night's council meeting — Deputy Mayor Elie Katz opposed it on grounds that it might hurt the township's ailing business districts. The rest of the seven-member council voted in favor, with Councilman Henry Pruitt absent.

Mayor Lizette Parker said the approved ban reflects a felt responsibility among officials to promote healthy lifestyles for young residents — many studies have found that most habitual smokers started before they turned 21.

"It was a very good, well thought out discussion on both sides, but I'm happy that it passed," Parker said Thursday of the ban. Without any legal challenges, the measure takes effect in a few weeks.

Currently, there is a bill pending in the state Assembly to raise the minimum age for the sale of all tobacco products and electronic smoking devices from age 19 to 21. In 2006, the New Jersey Legislature raised the limit from 18 to 19.

In August, the city of Englewood became the first in the state to raise the minimum age for the sale of tobacco products to 21. Sayreville followed in September.

The move follows a growing trend around the nation. New York City raised its limit to age 21 last year. And several towns in Massachusetts and a county in Hawaii prohibit the sale of tobacco products to people younger than age 21.

Teaneck code already fines vendors up to \$500 for sale of cigarettes and other nicotine delivery products to people under age 19. The code also allows up to 90 days of imprisonment in jail and suspension of retail food establishment license.

Representatives of groups for and against the measure — Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy and the New Jersey Gasoline-Convenience-Automotive Association — registered their opinions with the council on Wednesday. The convenience store lobby blasted the council's vote on Thursday.

"What they did in Teaneck is feel good, do nothing, silly legislation," said NJGCA executive director Sal Risalvato. "They didn't even have the guts to make it illegal to buy tobacco. They only penalize the people who are selling it and that's wrong."

Email: morrison@northjersey.com