

## Hillsdale council says no to tobacco sales change

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Hillsdale will not join the 11 other Bergen County municipalities that have banned the sale of tobacco products to anyone under age 21.

An ordinance that proposed raising the legal age to purchase tobacco products from 19 to 21 failed to pass at the Nov. 10 meeting in a 2 - 4 vote.

After hearing comments from Sal Risalvato, executive director of the New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience Store and Automotive Association (NJGCA), and a local convenience store owner, several council members and the mayor said that they felt passing the ordinance would negatively affect businesses and ultimately not deter young adults from smoking.

Risalvato cited a loss of revenue for convenience stores, not necessarily from the purchase of cigarettes, but from items that are often bought with cigarettes such as snacks and coffee.

He called the measure "feel good legislation" that would only force consumers to purchase their cigarettes in a neighboring town.

Council members who initially supported the ordinance cited concerns for small businesses when they voted against it on Tuesday.

Councilman John Ruocco compared the ordinance to a tax on small businesses that would cause revenue loss.

"I do support raising the age to 21, but I think it's most effective done at the statewide level," Ruocco said.

Mayor Max Arnowitz, who said that he quit smoking 35 years ago, was also in favor of raising the age statewide.

"The way this should be done is at a state level," he said. "We shouldn't be hurting our local businesses; they have enough of a hard time making money in this climate."

Council members Chrisoula Looes and Larry Meyerson maintained their support for the measure.

"To say that stores will lose revenue is guess work," Meyerson said, and referred to CVS Pharmacy's decision last year to stop selling cigarettes. "I don't think anybody here thinks that cigarettes have any redeeming quality whatsoever. They simply cause death and destruction for everyone around."

Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of Global Advisors of Smoke Free Policy (GASP), who spoke in support of the ordinance at the first reading, noted that youth and young adults are targeted at all levels by the tobacco industry.

"Every single day they need to replace someone who dies from smoking with a new smoker," she said. "Studies have proven that raising the age of sale to 21 will save a quarter of a million lives."

She added that 14 towns in New Jersey have passed the legislation, with Paterson and Wyckoff being the most recent.

The council moved forward with an amended version of a resolution that asks Trenton to raise the age statewide to 21.

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