

Evanston City Council outlaws tobacco sales to residents under 21

Council approved an amendment Monday to prohibit anyone under the age of 21 from buying tobacco or liquid nicotine products.

The amendment also outlaws the sale of tobacco products to those under 21. Aldermen voted unanimously to pass the proposed ordinance, making Evanston the first municipality in Illinois to increase the age, said Dr. Don Zeigler, a member of the Evanston Health Advisory Council at a Human Services Committee meeting on Oct. 6 .

The amendment first went in front of the subcommittee on Oct. 6 and passed unanimously to council. The legislation initially included a ban on the possession of tobacco products for those under the age of 21, but the section was taken out once the proposal was introduced to council at its Oct. 13 meeting.

“The problem I have with this is the idea that it does essentially criminalize something that’s legal across the border as far as possession and use of the products,” Ald. Donald Wilson (4th) said at the Oct. 13 meeting. “If someone is unfortunate enough to have already started smoking and become addicted to these products, we’re imposing a \$200 to \$500 fine on possessing and using them, and I’m not comfortable with that.”

Ald. Judy Fiske (1st) told The Daily on Monday that once the possession section of the amendment was removed, the amendment was able to pass through council easier. Now, 18-year-olds do not need to worry that they will be arrested when seen smoking on the street, Fiske said.

At the Oct. 13 meeting, Ald. Jane Grover (7th) said the increase in age is important because teenagers under the age of 18 don’t usually acquire tobacco products from illegal purchases. Instead, she said, they get them from their older peers.

By increasing the age, younger people are less likely to be able to access cigarettes, she said.

City manager Wally Bobkiewicz told The Daily on Monday he did not think the amendment will have a big impact on Northwestern students.

“I just don’t see smoking as a big issue at Northwestern,” Bobkiewicz said. “I think we’re dealing with a relatively small subset between 18 and 21. There are other places they can buy tobacco.”

Bobkiewicz said the amendment might give students pause before buying more cigarettes.

“If this gives them a second thought to why they need a cigarette, then perhaps that was what council was intending,” he said.

Enforcing the regulation will be similar to how it was before the passage of the amendment, Bobkiewicz said. The city will respond to any complaints about retailers that are issued by residents, he said. Inspectors from the city’s health department will regulate sellers as well, he said.

Fiske said she is concerned about how the amendment will affect local retailers.

“But, I think the overwhelming concern is for the health of our young people,” she told The Daily.

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