

Montague, Leverett: No tobacco for youth

By CHRIS CURTIS Recorder Staff Wednesday, January 21, 2015 (Published in print: Thursday, January 22, 2015)

MONTAGUE — With hopes other towns will follow, the Board of Health has made Montague the first town in Franklin County to raise the smoking age to 21 and ban flavored tobacco. The changes take effect July 1.

The board on Wednesday night approved draft regulations recently under discussion, banning sales of any flavored tobacco product — with the exception of menthol and other mint flavors — and raising the age for tobacco purchase from 18 to 21.

The move makes Montague the first town in Franklin County to take the steps, which proponents said are intended to prevent tobacco addiction by restricting sales to a vulnerable market and banning flavored products said to target young smokers.

Leverett's Board of Health passed the regulations later Wednesday night, according to Mary Kersell of the Franklin and Hampshire Substance and Tobacco Prevention Partnership.

She and Kara McLaughlin of the Gill-Montague Community School Partnership were present in Montague to support the change. None were present in opposition.

Kersell brought the draft regulation to the board and said she has approached other town health boards. Kersell said she expects Greenfield and Shelburne to take the regulations to a public hearing, Leverett has already had theirs and Deerfield and Whately want to see the regulations. In Hampshire County, Kersell said Granby has declined.

Chairman Michael Nelson said he suspected if the Montague board approved the regulations, surrounding towns would follow. Nelson said the July 1 effective date, in addition to lining up with the expiration of tobacco sales licenses will give surrounding towns time to do the same.

McLaughlin said that the latest survey of Franklin County youth, in February 2014, found that 15 percent of Gill-Montague 10th-graders reported tobacco use, which she said is higher than the county norm and may be double the national average.

McLaughlin presented letters of support on behalf of her organization and Gill-Montague Superintendent Michael Sullivan.

Board members said they had at least 10 letters of support and three letters in opposition, from F.L. Roberts, Cumberland Farms and a lawyer for the National Association of Tobacco Outlets.

"I think combined the flavor ban and the increase to age 21 could make a huge difference in the number of kids who start smoking in your town," Kersell said.

The three-member board unanimously endorsed the change.

You can reach Chris Curtis at: ccurtis@recorder.com or 413-772-0261, ext. 257