

Tobacco age upped to 21 in Peabody

BY ETHAN FORMAN STAFF WRITER | Posted: Thursday, August 27, 2015 10:20 pm

tobacco age upped to 21 in PEABODY

Ethan Forman/Staff photo College student Matt Mogavero, left, speaks out against a proposal by the Board of Health to increase the age one can buy tobacco or nicotine delivery products from 18 to 21, during a public hearing last night in Peabody City Hall. He said young adults should be able to make their own decisions. In the back at right is Thomas Chesbrough, a co-owner of Peabody Vapors on Main Street, who also opposes the new tobacco sales-age restriction.



PEABODY — The first time Board of Health Chairman Bernard Horowitz said he picked up a cigarette was at age 18 in college when he wanted to look grown up.

It's a decision he does not want future 18-year-olds to make.

"I would like to see the new 18-year-olds never pick up that cigarette," Horowitz said.

That was one of the reasons why Horowitz favored upping the age at which people can buy tobacco and nicotine delivery products in the city from 18 to 21.

The board, in a public hearing in front of 10 people last night in the lower level of City Hall, also approved language that provided the Board of Health more discretion when it came to meting out suspensions of potential violators of tobacco and e-cigarette rules.

The new restrictions would go into effect in 120 days, barring any legal challenges.

Peabody joins Salem and Danvers and neighboring Saugus in approving an increase in the tobacco sales age from 18 to 21.

Board of Health member Stephen Kalivas noted that Needham was the first community in the nation to up the tobacco sales age to 21, and he was convinced by a Brown University study that showed smoking rates among teens in Needham dropped 50 percent compared with a dozen surrounding communities.

Health Director Sharon Cameron noted that a relatively recent youth risk behavior survey from Peabody High had 19.6 percent of students self-reporting they smoked, which she said was above the state and national average.

Horowitz and two other members of the board also cited an Institute of Medicine study that looked at the public health impact of raising the "minimum age of legal access" to tobacco products.

The increase in age from 18 to 21 would reduce the number of 15 to 17 years old who would start smoking, the study found. It would also help people live longer and save lives.

The Board of Health voted unanimously to back the new tobacco restrictions, which were supported by North Shore/Cape Ann Tobacco and Alcohol Policy Program Director Joyce Redford, and Ken Farbstein, a Needham resident with the group, Tobacco Free Mass.

“This is the most significant motion you will make in your time on the board,” Farbstein said.

Redford noted that 74 communities in Massachusetts, about 28 percent of the Bay State’s population, have banned tobacco sales for those under 21. Two bills on Beacon Hill aim to make the tobacco sales age 21 statewide, she added.

The push to increase the tobacco and e-cigarette sales age to 21 has bubbled up locally, said Redford, who plans to meet with Beverly’s Board of Health next month.

Not everyone at last night’s hearing favored 21 as the new tobacco sales age.

Thomas Chesbrough, one of the owners of Peabody Vapors at 50 Main St., said those young people who come to his store at 18 are not new to smoking or vaping, and that the store’s products may help wean teens off cigarettes.

“This is a movement, and we are preventing them from being cigarette smokers,” Chesbrough said. He said it would be harder to reach young people at age 21. Redford pointed out that young people who work in vape stores are not medical professionals.

Chesbrough said after the hearing: “I would say it would have a dent on our business, but I don’t think it would affect us tremendously.” He said the real impact would be on those young people the store has helped kick the habit.

“I have respect for the law, regardless,” said Peabody Vapors co-owner Kevin Dang, who said the store has helped more than 500 quit smoking cigarettes.

“I don’t smoke, but I have. I don’t vape, but I have,” said college student Matt Mogavero. He said the Board of Health should not increase the tobacco sales age to 21 because 18-year-olds are considered legal adults who can pay taxes vote, buy lottery tickets and join the military.

“When someone chooses to smoke, it’s their decision,” Mogavero said.

Travis Wojcik, a candidate for School Committee, said instead of “oppressing” one segment of the population, “why not do the city a favor” and ban tobacco in the city.

Horowitz said he listened closely to arguments on both sides and appreciated the decorum of the meeting.

Staff writer Ethan Forman can be reached at 978-338-2673, by email at eforman@salemnews.com or on Twitter at [@DanverSalemNews](https://twitter.com/DanverSalemNews).