

# Pittsfield Board of Health raises tobacco age to 21

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**PITTSFIELD** — As of Nov. 1, smokers must be at least 21 years old to buy tobacco and nicotine delivery products in Pittsfield.

The city's Board of Health Wednesday night unanimously voted to raise the minimum age from 18 to 21, joining a growing trend of Massachusetts cities and towns adding another regulatory tool to curb youth smoking.

The five-member panel also agreed to cap the number of tobacco permits in Pittsfield to the current number of 52, with the goal to gradually reduce them through attrition. The revisions are a far cry from the existing city regulation to eventually cut almost in half the available permits, a measure adopted two years ago but opposed by tobacco retailer advocates during recent public debates over the permit capping issue.

Pittsfield is the eighth Berkshire municipality to restrict tobacco/nicotine delivery sales to those 21 and older; overall now 125 communities across the commonwealth have done so.

"We now have over 50 percent of the [state's] population under the Tobacco 21 policy," said Gina Armstrong, director of the Pittsfield Health Department.

The tobacco license cap means no new licenses will be issued beyond the current 52, however that number can be reduced over time as businesses with a tobacco license close and no new owner buys the store or a license is allowed to lapse when it expires.

The board seeks to let the marketplace determine if the city should have at most 52 licenses.

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The board had come under criticism from some city councilors over the cap provision now in place, after it resulted in denial of a permit for the owner of a new business who said he was unaware of the 2014 regulation change.

The 25 figure cap now in place was essentially cited as a long-term goal to reduce the city's density of tobacco sales outlets and smoking rates — both higher than the state average, according to city health officials.

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