

County raises tobacco buying age to 21

By Sarah Nelson / Staff writer

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Alachua County is now the first county in the state to raise the tobacco-buying age to 21.

County commissioners voted Tuesday night to hike the minimum age to buy tobacco from 18.

The new ordinance will be enforced in all areas of the county, and applies to all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, vaping products and liquid nicotine devices. Each municipality will have the opportunity to back out of the ordinance at any time.

Jerry Brewington, senior planner for the county’s growth management office, said the ordinance is aimed at stopping the sale of tobacco products. In other words, those under 21 won’t be penalized for smoking.

The ordinance also requires tobacco vendors to buy a sales license. The license will cost each business \$230 annually, and stores with licenses cannot be within 1,000 feet of a public school.

The county will use a corporation with experience enforcing tobacco compliance inspections within Florida, named Information Systems and Networks Corporations, to handle such tasks as maintaining data on violations and conducting inspections.

A new, part-time county staff position will process the licenses.

Many members of the nonprofit Tobacco Free Alachua County attended the meeting, saying the region should be the leader in phasing out youth tobacco use.

The ordinance passed 5-0 and will take effect in nine months.

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“We’re really happy,” Megan Hendricks, an Alachua County PTA member, said after the vote. “This will have a positive impact on our children.”

The county banned the sale of tobacco to those under 18 in 2013, with the rule extended to include e-cigarettes a few months later.

