

April 23, 2008

Bethany officials consider changes

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BETHANY BEACH -- Smokers: Puff wisely on the beach this summer. The Bethany Beach Town Council passed a new chapter to the town code regulating smoking in areas of the town, most notably large portions of the beach and boardwalk.

In a 6-1 vote, the council approved an ordinance making it illegal to smoke in town parks, playgrounds and the Boardwalk Plaza at the east end of Garfield Parkway at all times of the year, and make smoking illegal on the vast majority of the boardwalk and beach between May 15 and Sept. 15. Designated smoking areas are planned for both the beach and the boardwalk, equipped with proper disposal receptacles for cigars and cigarettes.

The passing of the ordinance was not without discussion. Councilman Steve Wode, returning to the council after spending the summer in Florida, stated concerns that the town passing a law regarding smoking on the beach would be setting a precedent saying secondhand smoke outdoors is a real threat. Wode said not all studies have agreed with that sentiment.

Councilman Jerry Dorfman reminded Wode that Bethany Beach is not alone in banning smoking.

"We're not the first beach town to ban smoking," he said. "It's been done coast to coast. We wouldn't be setting a precedent."

The ordinance was amended to appease all members of the council to say secondhand smoke "may be" harmful outdoors, and was passed. The proposed fines system for the smoking ban was also passed, albeit by a unanimous vote. A second offense of smoking in a non-designated area within four months of the first offense will result in a \$100 fine, and all subsequent citations in the same four month period will cost offenders \$500.

The council also approved a memorandum of understanding with the Bethany Beach Volunteer Fire Company to provide ambulance service to the town beginning on Jan. 1, 2009. The Millville Volunteer Fire Company ambulance service, which currently serves the district, announced in 2007 it is ceasing ambulance service to the Bethany fire district at the end of the year.

The council unanimously passed the memorandum of understanding with the fire company. Bethany Beach Mayor Carol Olmstead, who along with officials from South Bethany, Fenwick Island and Sea Colony, has been instrumental in discussions with fire company representatives since February, said the other affected municipalities of the fire district are already on board with the plan.

"At this time, South Bethany, Sea Colony, and

Council members stated some concerns over some budgetary issues with the contract, although meetings are being worked out with the fire company to iron out details for a future contract. Councilman Robert Parsons, a supporter of the ambulance service, but not of the lack of state government assistance in bringing the service to Bethany, applauded his fellow council members on passing the latest step in ensuring the safety of people in the Bethany fire district.

"The State Legislature couldn't get this done," he said. "(Governor Minner's) appointed fire commissioners

