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"For Everyone's Health, Please Consider Not Smoking In Our Parks and Playgrounds."

May 26, 2011



Alexandria To Post Anti Smoking Signs In Public Playgrounds

By Carla Branch
alexandrianews.org

This summer, Alexandria will post signs in 35 public playgrounds asking people to refrain from smoking. The City Council approved the measure last night by a vote of 5-2, with Councilman Frank Fannon and Councilwoman Alicia Hughes voting no.

Councilwoman Del Pepper brought the proposed resolution forward at the request of the Alexandria Public Health Advisory Commission. "Since we first discussed this, we have worked closely with the city attorney to come up with wording that is just right," Pepper said. "We are not banning smoking in public parks, playgrounds and bus shelters because we don't have that right: this is a Dillon Rule state.

"We wanted to encourage people not to smoke in these public places where others will suffer the impact of second-hand smoke. We particularly want to protect our children and that is why we are going to begin with our playgrounds," Pepper said.

The signs will read: "For everyone's health, please consider not smoking in our parks and playgrounds." The Alexandria Health Department will spend \$5000 to print the signs for the playgrounds. They will be posted this summer and staff will report back to Council on their effectiveness in the fall.

"Depending on what that report says, we will consider posting signs in city-owned bus shelters," Pepper said.

Fannon voted against the measure. "This is a free society and government should not be in the business of telling people how to behave when it comes to something that is legal such as smoking," he said.

Councilman Rob Krupicka helped craft the compromise language for the signs. "This is the right thing to do and is in keeping with our strategic plan and our Eco City charter," he said. "Everyone agrees that second-hand smoke is bad for those who are exposed to it. It is the right thing to do to protect our children from any health risk."

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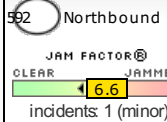
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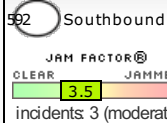
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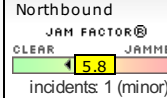
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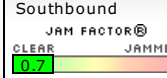
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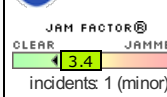


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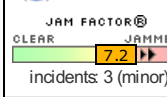
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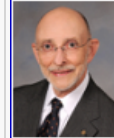
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I'm not a smoker and I can't stand second hand smoke, but putting up signs in parks and playground is not going to stop people from smoking, since the habit is legal. People who are addicted to nicotine will light up without thinking about it, much as many do now, while walking outside.

In unconfined places, such as parks and playgrounds, smoke tends to often rise, so the 'second-hand smoke' issue quite often isn't a factor, unless you're next to the person smoking.

A bigger issue here though, are a few dog owners throughout Alexandria, who let their dogs run unleashed in parks and playgrounds, and who don't pick up after their dogs.

There's not one person reading this who can tell me that it doesn't happen, because I see it in Old Town parks all the time. As a matter of fact, there are posted signs stating that people have to have their dogs leashed and they have to pick up after their dogs, yet some dog owners completely ignore the signs.

The anti-smoking signs, in my opinion, will be ignored by cigarette smokers, much like some dog owners disregard signs to let their dogs run free and not pick up after them either.

Where is the overall outcry about some dog owners letting their dogs run free and not picking up after them in parks and playgrounds in Alexandria?

The silence about this issue is deafening.

(By the way, I have a dog and don't let him run free in parks unless he's in an actual fenced in 'dog park', and I do pick up after him.)

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