

# Riverview Dec 9/03 seeks N.B.-wide smoking ban

■ If N.B. rejects call for ban, municipalities will have to decide whether to impose their own

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Riverview town council voted last night to join Moncton in calling for a province-wide ban on smoking in all public places.

However, the vote was only carried by a 3-2 margin. Ward 1 Coun. Gordon Cowan, Ward 2 Coun. Bill McBeath and Coun.-at-large Ann Seamans approved the motion, while Ward 3 Coun. Gerry Forsythe and Ward 4 Coun. Clarence Sweetland voted against it.

The call for the smoking ban is a recommendation of the tri-community council that was presented to Moncton, Riverview and Dieppe councils. Moncton city council approved it at a recent meeting.

McBeath, on making the motion, said exposure to tobacco smoke results in more than \$15 million in health care costs for New Brunswickers, an estimated \$39 million in productivity loss and most importantly, about 160 lives lost per year.

He said the three communities can enact smoking laws of their own, but it cannot be comprehensive due to existing provincial legislation. Private clubs, for example, would be immune due to regulations in the Municipalities Act.

McBeath said the proposed province-wide legislation would ban the smoking of any tobacco product in all enclosed places with the exception of private residences.

Also included, he said, would be outdoor public places where citizens may congregate or move through, such as public entryways, gathering places, outdoor sports facilities and outdoor entertainment and cultural events.

Forsythe said he would have trouble supporting such a ban because of the way it is written. For example, public facilities like bingo halls should be exempted, he suggested, noting the government "cannot afford to have service clubs that rely on bingo for their programs to lose that source of funding.

"Bingo players will go where they can smoke. You will see bingo halls growing up on the outskirts of towns," he said.

Deputy Mayor Charles Broderick noted that if it is a province-wide ban, the bingo halls would not be protected by being outside a municipality.

"It can be if it is a native-operated establishment," replied Forsythe. He said the province cannot regulate First Nations-owned property.

Sweetland said he used to be a smoker himself and "now I hate to be around it." But having said that, he added that he is concerned that private clubs would be included in the ban.

"If a half-dozen people get together and form a club, and the government tells them what they can do in the club, I have problems with that," he said.

Seamans said other businesses tell her that if their establishments have to prohibit smoking and the private clubs do not, it is going to be difficult for them to compete. Unless it applies to everyone, it is not fair, she said.

"The key word here is 'private,'" said Sweetland. "And government meddling in private areas may be going too far."

Cowan said a provincial prohibition on smoking in all public establishments is probably still "a long ways down the road." He said he would, therefore, like to see the three councils pass their own legislation in the meantime, similar to what they did in Fredericton.