

Calvert to consider park smoking ban

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Prince Frederick, MD - Locals who want area parks to become smoke-free are hoping the Calvert County Commissioners will take the necessary action to make it happen. On Tuesday, Jan. 23, the board conducted a work session on the proposal to impose a ban on all forms of smoking, including vaping. Prior to the work session, three individuals, including an anti-smoking advocate from Prince George's County, requested the board to approve a prohibition.

Calvert County Director of Parks and Recreation Shannon Q. Nazzal (pictured above, right) noted that the county placed "pretty please signs" in the parks in 2012 asking park-users not to smoke. Last year, nonsmoking advocates requested that county leaders revisit the issue with a goal of establishing tobacco-free parks. At least three of the commissioners indicated they support the spirit of the proposal.

"I hate it," said Commissioner Mike Hart [R-District 1], who conceded he does sell cigarettes at his liquor store in Lusby. Hart stated he attends several youth sporting events at county parks and finds it irritating when other adults are smoking.

"It's not a good place to smoke," said Commissioner Pat Nutter [R-District 2].

"I abhor smoking more than anybody on this board," said Commissioners' President

Evan K. Slaughenhaupt Jr. [R-District 3]. Both Nutter and Slaughenhaupt did, however, express concerns about imposing their aversion to smoking in a public recreation park upon citizens who do smoke.

"We need to hear from all sides and make a rational decision," said Slaughenhaupt.

During the work session Nazzal presented data showing that tobacco use among high school students in "fairly high" and student smokers in Calvert are well above the state average. "Smoking and the use of tobacco has been declining nationwide due to the efforts of individual citizens and groups to educate the public on the dangers of tobacco use and second-hand smoke, however, smoking in Calvert County is higher than the state and national average," Nazzal stated in a memo to the county commissioners. While Nazzal, who was hired by the county last year when Parks and Recreation transitioned from a division to a department, label the effort "a step in the right direction, smoking and tobacco usage in parks is still ongoing in Calvert County."

Nazzal stated that both the local sheriff's office and health department support a public education initiative that would hopefully result in Calvert's parks being smoke-free. She presented a recommendation to the board to "direct staff to craft an ordinance for public hearing to restrict the use of tobacco products and electronic smoking devices at county-owned or operated Parks and Recreation facilities; and direct staff to create an educational campaign for smoke and tobacco-free parks." The commissioners unanimously approved the recommendation. One issue that might need to be resolved regarding the drafting of the ordinance is whether smoking would be banned at Chesapeake Hills Golf Course. Nazzal told the commissioners she favors an "across-the-board" ban.

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