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Region to try smoking ban again

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

Three years after an initial attempt failed, York Region is poised to adopt a region-wide bylaw banning smoking in

public places and offices. Six of the region's nine municipalities have officially endorsed a bylaw that outlaws smoking in any York Region workplace, restaurant, banquet hall,

bowling alley or skating rink, beginning June 1, 2001.

The same provisions will apply to bars, nightclubs, billiard and bingo halls in June 2004.

With fines as high as \$5,000, business owners can allow smoking in 25 per cent of their establishments within fully enclosed and separately ventilated smoking rooms. No-smoking signs must also be posted.

Newmarket and Richmond Hill did not support a regional smoking ban and Aurora wanted all facilities exempt until 2004.

However, if York Region council approves the regional bylaw at Thursday's meeting, the act will supersede any local bylaw.

"Three years ago, it was a tremendous setback," regional chairperson Bill Fisch explained after the no-smoking task force approved the bylaw, in principle, on Thursday. "Unless we could win this thing, I did not want to bring it forward again."

Debate surrounding a smoking ban has lingered for the past five years, with Vaughan being the first York Region municipality to pass its own no-smoking bylaw.

"We now have six municipalities that realize we have to act on this," said task force chairperson Joyce Frustaglio, a Vaughan regional councillor. "The other municipalities just need a little more time."

However, Dorothy McCabe, executive director of the Richmond Hill Chamber of Commerce, criticized the bylaw, arguing it will create hardship for owners of bars and restaurants.

Enforcing the law across the region will also prove difficult, she said.

"I don't mean to rain on your parade but I just don't see how this is going to happen. And I just don't believe this is fair," McCabe charged. "I'm not advocating smoking, but it's just a question of the economic impact on the region."

But Frustaglio said the bylaw will create a level playing field for everyone, removing the barriers of municipal boundaries.

"When you consider many regions in southern Ontario are considering similar bylaws, I can't imagine the business community being affected in any way."

Meanwhile, Dr. Helena Jaczek, York Region's medical officer of health, said the health department will use the bylaw to educate residents about the dangers of tobacco and smoking.

Newmarket Regional Councillor Diane Humeniuk expressed disappointment that her local council did not approve the regional approach.

"I listed for them a plethora of materials, bylaws and reports," she said. "I'm sorry to say we could not convince them."

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