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LONGBOAT KEY

WEDNESDAY, SEP. 14, 2022 23 min ago

Town takes next step with initial approval of beach smoking ban

The second reading and adoption by the Longboat Key Town Commission is scheduled for Oct. 3.

by: **Lauren Tronstad** | Staff Writer

Smoking on the beach and in Longboat Key parks is one step closer to being banned in the town.

The first reading of the ordinance was passed with a 6-0 vote by the Longboat Key Town Commission on Monday, Sept. 12 as part of their first meeting back after its summer recess.

District 2 Commissioner Debra Williams was absent from the meeting.

The ban would not hinder use of unfiltered cigars and pipe tobacco use, which is protected by state law.



they asked town staff to skip that step and be ready with a prepared ordinance for their first meeting back.


"I think the only change that would be anticipated would be an addition of signage to indicate smoking would not be allowed," Allen Parson, the town's Planning, Zoning and Building Director said. "It would be a pretty easy addition to the signage that we have on our beach access points."

Much like other prohibited behaviors, including bringing dogs on the beach or alcoholic beverages, law enforcement would be able to respond to calls and observations of the behavior.

The commission vote [follows Sarasota City Commission's initial approval](#) of a similar ban.

City commissioners unanimously approved the first reading of two ordinances intended primarily to prevent the proliferation of cigarette butts on beaches and in city parks on Sept. 6. Holmes Beach has also approved a first reading of its ordinance with a second reading scheduled for Tuesday. The City of Venice has planned discussions on the topic Tuesday as well.

"We are not alone in pursuing this," Parsons said. "This addition would be fairly straightforward. We have a number of activities that are prohibited at parks, beaches and public places; this would add smoking to the list of prohibited activities."

 **PREV ARTICLE** owledge that other local entities are moving in the same direction aided in the Town Commission's decision to also approve the first reading of the ordinance.

"I certainly don't want to have Longboat Key be the only smoking beach around here," Vice Mayor Maureen Merrigan said.

At the time of Parsons' report, Bradenton, Anna Maria and Manatee County did not have scheduled discussions about a potential ban.

Her comments also switched the conversation to keeping the beaches clean and the Key more environmentally friendly as a whole.

"If it's about littering, it's a bit redundant because you are not allowed to litter on the beaches," Merrigan said.

She added her concern with the plastic and soda cans littering beaches even as a rule is already in place against leaving trash in the sand.

"If we are going to be serious about becoming a premier community, we've got to be serious about what we are doing environmentally," Commissioner BJ Bishop said. "We are way behind the 8-ball. Longboat Key is further ahead than most, but I think we can do a lot more."



The statewide legislation that allows for this ban to be put in place amends Florida's Clean Indoor Air Act. The bill was signed into law June 24 and took effect July 1.

According to the Ocean Conservancy, cigarette butts have been the most commonly found litter on Florida beaches during the organization's annual Coastal Cleanup for the past 31 years. The butts are made of tightly packed plastic fibers that erode into smaller bits, which accumulate in fish and other organisms, adversely impacting sea life health and reproductivity as well as human health when consuming the affected fish.

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