

Council Stands By Original Smoking Ban Bill At Special Meeting

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St. Charles County, Missouri - The St. Charles County Council, at a special meeting Saturday morning, decided to stand by its original bill calling for a charter amendment in the form of a ballot proposition concerning a countywide ban on smoking in enclosed public places.

The Council considered a new bill that would have changed the ballot language to merge the smoking ban with three exceptions _ places requiring patrons and employees to be age at least 21 years of age, private clubs, and 20 percent of hotel rooms.

Councilman Joe Cronin, the sponsor of both the original and second bill, said the Council did a lot of "soul-searching" and came to the conclusion that passing "something that was weak and watered down made no sense."

So, after meeting for two hours Saturday, the Council decided to take no action on the second bill and withdrew it from the floor.

Elections Director Rich Chrismer said last week that the language on the original smoking ban bill was too confusing and he announced he would not put it on the November ballot.

That bill would have allowed voters to decide if they wanted a smoking ban in enclosed public places and, if so, should exemptions be granted. It gave the voters the power to choose both issues, Cronin said.

"Mr. Chrismer effectively took that choice from the voters," Cronin said.

Council Chair Nancy Matheny said, "We felt good about allowing the voters to make those decisions. We do not believe Rich Chrismer was right in taking that right away from the people, and we ask him to reconsider and put it on the ballot."

Matheny said the Council would not file a lawsuit against the Election Authority to try and get the bill on the Nov. 6 ballot.

She said that would be "distasteful."

"Filing such a lawsuit would not only damage the relationships between county elected officials, who need to work together, but could also cost the taxpayers a great deal of money," Matheny said, adding that outside legal counsel would have to be retained.

The county has already been forced to hire outside legal counsel to represent the Election Authority on other issues involving Chrismer.

Cronin said the smoking ban proposition could still be on the ballot if another organization "interested in clean air in St. Charles County" would sue the Election Authority and get a court to overrule Chrismer's decision.

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