

Officials propose Milton to be tobacco-free workplace

By **RICK MILLER**
Associate Editor

A proposed ordinance to make Milton a tobacco-free workplace had its first reading approved unanimously at Tuesday's city council meeting. Council members and city staffers expressed support for the proposal, which was unanimously recommended by the city personnel and finance committee.

Police Chief Jerry Schuetz had also thrown his support to a tobacco-free workplace prior to Tuesday's meeting because officers had no legal basis to deny people from smoking in squad cars while they were being transported.

The current city policy as stated in the employee handbook says that in keeping with a safe and healthful working environment, "smoking in the workplace is discouraged." The use of chewing tobacco is not addressed.

Schuetz told council members that not using tobacco is simply part of what is considered professional behavior, noting that in the past any police officer that had a desk was also issued an ashtray, but not anymore.

"As hard and uncomfortable and as unpopular as it may be," Schuetz said, "I do believe that going with this policy...is just part of that slow evolution of professionalism. Although I will be less popular for saying this, I think it's the right thing to do."

Some of the most poignant comments

of support came from smoker and council member Tom Chesmore, also a member of the personnel and finance committee that brought the recommendation. He said he was committed to supporting any conclusion of the city's top cop.

"I agree with the chief on the professionalism issue," Chesmore said, then looking at Schuetz added, "Now there will be two of us who won't be very popular."

The notion of being unpopular was raised because all officials knew there would be some tobacco-using city employees not happy with the proposal, though a memo said "very few" still use

tobacco while on the job. Asked about the feelings toward the tobacco ban in the department of public works, director Howard Robinson said,

"I've got one employee very happy, three or four that don't care and five or six very unhappy."

Robinson said most were understanding

about the issue when it came to sharing vehicles with each other, but some had asked whether a portion of the city garage could be designated a smoking area, and others wondered if they could chew tobacco while performing duties in an open area such as when they're mowing grass.

But there were concerns among council members that making any exceptions would create enforcement problems. Chesmore again took the lead, noting his own tobacco use but saying any ban should be all or nothing because the state legislature may

act if the city doesn't.

"If we're going to have to enforce this it's going to have to be across the board," Chesmore said, "I use cigarettes but I figure it this way: It's either going to be us, or the state, and I'd rather have the jump and not have the state come in here and force us to do something. I know it's not a popular thing...but you learn to adjust. It's an overwhelming trend."

He also referenced a survey City Administrator Todd Schmidt gave to 33 municipalities and agencies around the state with results showing the vast majority of 21 had already enacted total bans on tobacco use for all city employees. The only reason the survey didn't come back with 100 percent bans was because some had no policy on chewing tobacco, and only the Village of Hales Corners had a designated smoking area in a municipal building.

"Obviously we're just a little bit behind and I think it's time we catch up," Chesmore commented.

Presuming the ordinance passes sec-

ond and third readings to become law, the city employee handbook will also be revised to prohibit the use of tobacco in any municipal buildings, vehicles and during the performance of work duties. The use of tobacco products would still be allowed outdoors during non-working breaks.

In other business Tuesday, the council discussing consent agenda procedures at the request of council member Maxine Striegl who said last month that she had some concerns with the current process.

All items listed in the consent agenda have already been discussed in city committees and are considered routine, such as Tuesday's approval of blacktop bids for the 2009 construction season, so they are all approved with one motion. But Striegl said many cannot attend committee meetings that are held during work hours, and added, "not everybody has a computer" to be able to ready meeting minutes at the city website.

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JERRY SCHUETZ
Police chief, on the proposed tobacco use ban

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TOM CHESMORE
council member, on the city's current tobacco policy

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