

Council considers tobacco retail licenses

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The Crescent City Council is considering requiring gas stations, vape shops and other tobacco retailers to get a tobacco retail license with the city.

Amber Wier, project director for NorCal 4 Health — a California Health Collaborative project focused on reducing tobacco influences — spoke to the council about ways to limit youth tobacco use at a Monday meeting.

Weir suggested imposing tobacco retail licenses. Much like a liquor license, a tobacco retail license would set a cap on the amount of tobacco retailers in the city, as well as, limiting tobacco flavors and advertisements near schools, said Wier.

Some members of the council were not in favor of imposing more restrictions on tobacco retailers.

“It feels like we are going to be licensing businesses right out of town,” said Councilman Beau Smith. “I’m all about a healthier tomorrow and protecting my kids from tobacco, but I am my kids’ parent and I feel like it’s my duty to warn them about that stuff.”

Mayor Jason Greenough said citizens should have the right to make their own decisions about smoking. He also expressed concerns about damaging retailers selling tobacco products.

“I don’t smoke. I don’t support smoking, but I do support people’s right to choose,” said Greenough. “This seems like it’s both limiting a person’s ability to do business and limiting a person’s choice at the same time...when it comes to limiting the number of stores that carry tobacco, it just seems like you’re trying to pick the winners and losers here.”

Greenough added he would not support any future actions on a measure like this.

Councilman Ray Altman was in support of a move to create a tobacco retail license. He said it would not really impact local businesses, just as a liquor license does little to impact a liquor retailer, unless they are caught selling to minors, he said.

Then, the discussion heated up when Mayor Pro Tem Blake Inscore criticized Greenough for jumping to conclusions.

“Frankly Mr. mayor, if you have specific research you’ve done about this topic that you would like to express to this council, I would be welcome to hear that, but the idea of already identifying where you would stand on a policy standpoint without even having a broader system of research and investigation and discussion seems very inappropriate,” said Inscore

Greenough clarified he was open to further discussion, and ultimately he elected to form an ad-hoc committee to further explore the idea — with himself, Chief of Crescent City Police Richard Griffin and Councilman Smith being appointed to the ad-hoc.

The council passed a different measure restricting tobacco use in December, which was a smoking ban for all multi-unit housing in the city, including apartments and condominiums. Then councilman Greenough, voted against that measure for similar concerns about civil liberties.

Of the 58 counties in California, Del Norte ranks among the worst in the average life expectancy and health behaviors categories — 51st and 56th, respectively, according to NorCal 4 Health indicators.

A 2019 study by Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community found that 22% of adults in Del Norte County smoke, which is more than double the state average. There are currently 26 tobacco retailers in the county, said Wier.

During an active public comment period, members of the community spoke both in favor and against moving forward with a citywide tobacco retail license. Among the dissenters were Dave Gearhart, owner of High Tide Vapes. Gearhart said retailers are already required to obtain a tobacco retail license through the state.