

Council adopts enforcement of smoking ban into municipal code

BY Matthew Barba
Sentinel News Staff

WAMAC - Wamac City Council met Wednesday to discuss two hot topics in the form of the Illinois public smoking ban and what the city will have to do to ensure that plenty of salt is available for any winter weather that might still be on its way.

Mayor "Butch" Mathus has been leading area efforts against what he feels is an injustice to simple human freedoms ever since the state announced that the smoking ban would go into effect on Jan. 1. Mathus also sees a number of discrepancies that make enforcing the law inconsistent across differing service industries.

"We want to prevent people from being criminalized from what should essentially be a tenement of human freedom. It's American freedom, really, and it isn't right that state can come in here, and tell a business how to operate," Mathus explained.

To prevent residents and patrons of business from becoming criminalized, the Council voted to adopt enforcement of the law into the city's municipal code. By doing so, the Wamac Police Department will be responsible for issuing warnings and citations.

"The law itself has a number of discrepancies and it's really just confusing. If you look at the way the law is written now, it's possible for two agencies to issue tickets on the same incident. Now we have eliminated that confusion," Mathus said.

Mathus' next goal is to eliminate the discrepancies that he feels are present among differing service industries. "The law allows for exemptions in the hotel and nursing home industries already. It says that it will not adversely impact the economic state of some businesses, but we've already seen where it has. We don't think it's fair that one business is exempt and not another," he said.

After the large gathering at Fat's in Sandoval to protest the smoking ban last month, Mathus believes that enough support in the area can be mustered to make a strong statement to legislators that people will not accept this kind of law that limits their basic freedoms.

"We are gathering petitions now, and soon, after we've gotten all we think we're going to get, we'll take the petitions to Springfield and make our voices known," Mathus said.

The Council also discussed the salt crunch that Wamac, as well as many other communities, are facing. As sleet fell on the windows, the Council was made aware that the city's reserves of salt are running low and that while there would be enough for Monday's storm, there might not be enough if another severe winter weather storm hits the area.

If the city would require another load of salt to combat another or a prolonged winter storm, they would have to buy by the semi-truck load. The possibility of buying a small amount of salt from a neighboring community was raised, but the Council was told that most communities are facing shortages themselves from the intense winter weather that has plagued Southern Illinois recently.