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Viewpoint

Tobacco-free parks are fast becoming the norm

By Bev Benda

GRAND FORKS — Hats off to Molly Soeby of the Grand Forks Park Board, for being "progressive" in her quest to make life better for future generations by promoting tobacco-free parks in Grand Forks.



Benda

young people.

We need the Park Board to take this issue seriously and support this idea that is centered on protecting young people from the addiction of tobacco.

This is not a "ginormous can of worms," as one of Soeby's fellow commissioners suggested. This is a "ginormous opportunity" to make Grand Forks a healthier community, especially for our

While teen smoking is going down for males, chewing tobacco usage is going up. Making matters worse, the tobacco industry spends more than \$26 million a day marketing tobacco to youth.

When young people have easy access to tobacco and see it as the "norm," they are more likely to try it.

Tobacco-free parks are the gold standard nationwide. This is not a new concept and is no more dictatorial than are the signs in the park that say "Drive slow," "Clean up after your dog" or "Replace your divots on the golf course."

Every park rule has a rationale, and the public needs education before the rule can become the "norm."

Tobacco-free parks are safer and cleaner. Consider the litter that tobacco products add to our parks. Some toddlers and puppies will eat anything, even wads of tobacco or cigarette butts on the playground,



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which are toxic to small bodies.

Most important of all, tobacco-free parks give children one more public place where adults are seen not using tobacco, thus contributing to the "social norming" of healthy lifestyles.

Healthy lifestyles reduce health care costs across the board.

Regarding enforcement, look to the success of the many parks that already have instituted tobacco-free policies, including those in North Dakota: Wahpeton, Langdon, Cando, Beulah, Milnor, Gwinner, Rolette, Forman, Cogswell and most recently, Mayville.

Jamestown's dog park, Pepper's Dog Park, opened last year tobacco-free.

Most people will abide with a good conscience when there is good signage placed. No police are required.

Imaginations have run a bit wild with visions of police conducting "mouth checks" at the park; that

would be an invasion of privacy, not to mention a poor use of law enforcement time.

Remember. Most people do not even use tobacco.

The Park Board needs to recognize the importance of role-modeling as well; it employs talented coaches and staff, and young people look up to them.

Last year, Bud Selig and Major League Baseball, through the influence of Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, tightened the rules on smokeless tobacco through the Knock It Out of the Park campaign after recognizing the influence baseball players have on youth. Even though some baseball players still chew, they cannot do it on the field or in front of the TV camera.

It is time for Grand Forks to follow MLB's lead, upgrade our community, and knock it out of our parks, too.

Benda is a life and wellness coach and a dietitian in Grand Forks.