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# New, desirable norm

- Cooperstown leads way with smokeless chew ban; is Grand Forks next?



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Usually, cultural change in North Dakota starts in the bigger cities and seeps down to less populated towns. That isn't necessarily the case when it comes to tobacco, however. Earlier this year, Cooperstown, N.D., a town of about 1,000 people in Griggs County, passed a tobacco ban in its city park. The ban includes the use of smokeless tobacco. The Grand Forks Park Board hasn't taken that extra step. "We accepted the state law, which has no ban on smokeless," said Bill Palmiscno, Park District director. "And, the way it was explained to us by the city health department, the smoking ban is about being around activities. If you go off alone somewhere in the park, you're OK to smoke." Leading the charge in Cooperstown was Julie Ferry, administrator of the Nelson-Griggs Health Unit. "I can't take credit for it," Ferry said. "The credit needs to go to health-minded people on the Cooperstown Park Board and their employees."

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# TOBACCO TALK

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A popular — and somewhat defensible — argument for not including smokeless tobacco is that there's no second-hand damage to non-users, as there is with smoke. But Ferry comes well-armed to argue that point.

Her case is that: 1) Chew can have second-hand damage because it's spit on the ground and can be consumed by youngsters and pets; 2) Chew sets a bad example; and 3) Banning chew can help to set a new, more desirable norm.

"If we adopt policies that limit places you can do something, that creates a new social norm," Ferry said. "The social norm used to be that you could smoke on airplanes. Now you can't.

"The consequence to others is them seeing it and thinking it's an acceptable behavior. We need to role model for our youth."

Molly Soeby, a first-term commissioner

who has brought diversity to the Grand Forks Park Board in more ways than her gender, hasn't given up her efforts to make parks tobacco-free. She has applied for a grant to conduct two surveys about the issue. One would be for the general public and the other specific to golfers and softball players, anticipated to be the demographic most opposed to a ban.

"The whole purpose behind this is to not get kids started because it's so addicting," Soeby said.

If the grant comes through, the survey should be completed by the end of summer. If the survey is favorable to her cause, Grand Forks may become the next Cooperstown.

"It's sometimes easier to watch what bigger cities do, so you can find out where the battlegrounds are," Ferry said. "On the other hand, because everyone knows everyone else, small towns can get things done faster."

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