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ORANGE COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH SEEKS PUBLIC INPUT: PROPOSED SMOKE-FREE RULE

Hillsborough, NC (September 27, 2012) – During its meeting on Wednesday night, the Orange County Board of Health spent time reviewing results from a survey of elected officials and other key community stakeholders on a proposed Smoke-Free Public Places rule.

Eighty-eight people responded to the survey including mayors, city council members, human resource directors, police officers, town managers, and others.

Of those surveyed, more than 90 percent support a comprehensive county-wide smoke-free public places rule. The most significant discord relates to sidewalks and government grounds, but only with 21.8% and 15.9% respectively saying they do not support a smoking ban in those locations. There is overwhelming support of a smoking ban in Government vehicles (100%), Elevators (98.8%), and Child care facilities (97.7%).

The survey includes open-ended questions in regards to perceived benefits and drawbacks to a Smoke-Free Public Places Rule. Most respondents agree that improved general health and avoiding secondhand smoke are the biggest benefits however; a few respondents mention the economic benefits of increasing visitors to Orange County, due to a smoke-free status.

“I think that this policy, along with other tobacco control measures, help to make everyone healthier and encourage current smokers to quit,” commented one respondent.

Related to drawbacks, the most common response is that respondents do not foresee any drawbacks to the rule. Of those that identifying drawbacks, the majority cite concerns about enforcement and infringing on personal freedoms of smokers.

“Un-enforceable, and restrictive to the point it will be counterproductive,” commented another respondent.

Upon reviewing the survey results, Board of Health members agree to move forward with slight modifications including clarification of the exemption of the university and the extent of the sidewalk regulation. Now they are seeking public opinion from County residents and those who work in Orange County.

“We want to hear from as many people as possible when it comes to this rule,” said Board of Health Chair, Tony Whitaker.

A public comment period will be open from Thursday, September 27 - Wednesday, October 24, 2012. The public is encouraged to provide input, using one of the following options:

- 1) An online survey can be accessed at www.surveymonkey.com/s/OCSFPP
- 2) A telephone comment line, 919.245.2480, allows people to leave their comments if they do not have access to the Internet and/or will not be able to attend the public hearing.
- 3) Written comments can be sent by e-mail to SFPP@OrangeCountyNC.gov or via U.S. mail to Orange County Health Department, c/o Smoke-Free Public Places, 300 W. Tryon Street, Hillsborough, NC 27278.
- 4) A public hearing will be held as part of the Board of Health meeting at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, October 24, 2012, in the Main Library Conference Room located at 137 W. Margaret Lane; Hillsborough, NC 27278. Interpreters will be available.

After the public hearing on October 24, 2012, the Board of Health will discuss and vote on the proposed rule. If the Board of Health adopts the rule, it will then be sent to the Orange County Board of County Commissioners to vote and adopt by ordinance at a future meeting.

Background

The 2010 NC Smoke-free Restaurants and Bars Law (N.C. Gen. Stat. 130A-498) allows local governments to adopt and enforce smoke-free ordinances that are more comprehensive than State law in local government buildings, on local government grounds, in local vehicles, or in public places.

The proposed Orange County Board of Health rule would prohibit smoking in County and Town buildings, vehicles and government grounds and in public places in Orange County, the Towns of Carrboro, Chapel Hill, Hillsborough and those parts of Mebane within the County limits.

Secondhand smoke is known to increase the risk of lung cancer, heart disease, heart attack and lung disease in nonsmokers and according to the Surgeon General; there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. As the second healthiest county in North Carolina, the Board of Health feels it is in the best interest of our citizens and those who visit Orange County to be provided with a healthy and smoke-free environment.

Resources and data:

Overview of the Rule

<http://orangecountync.gov/health/index.asp>

Secondhand Smoke Exposure (Source: NC Division of Health and Human Services):

<http://www.tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdhhs.gov/shs/index.htm>

Smoking (Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/health_effects/effects_cig_smoking/index.htm

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