

SMOKEFREE PARKS PRESERVE BAKER CITY'S LIVABILITY



BAKER CITY IS A TOWN STEEPED IN HISTORY:

Adjacent to the Oregon Trail and home to a downtown core that forms the largest commercial historical district in the state of Oregon, Baker is a community that invests in preservation. Since 1993, community leaders have helped facilitate restorations of 80 buildings within the downtown district, as well as adding streetscape amenities like banners, benches, trees, bicycle racks, planters and historic district signs. According to the Baker City Chamber of Commerce, these efforts have enhanced community pride and livability.

Baker County also promotes itself as the “base camp” for exploring Eastern Oregon’s unlimited outdoor recreation

opportunities, urging visitors to explore its pristine mountains, lakes, rivers, and miles of hiking trails.

However, Baker County also has one of the highest rates of tobacco use in Oregon, with about 1 in 4 adults and about 1 in 10 youth reporting current tobacco use.

Due, in large part, to increased public awareness of the dangers of tobacco resulting from local Tobacco Prevention & Education Program (TPEP) efforts, community members said they wanted to support a more vital Baker City by creating cleaner and healthier public spaces. Building on that momentum, the Baker City Council passed a smokefree ordinance in January, 2014 that covers all Baker City parks, including the 2-mile Leo Adler Memorial Pathway, which stretches through their historic downtown and beyond.

LOCAL TOBACCO PREVENTION & EDUCATION PROGRAMS (TPEP) AT WORK

BUILDING A MOVEMENT

working together, collaborating across sectors, and sharing local data and best practices to reach the common goal of healthy communities.

CREATING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

promoting health and wellness through policy decisions and systems changes that support healthy options for all community members.

SUCCESSFUL PASSAGE OF THE SMOKEFREE CITY PARKS ORDINANCE WAS A TEAM EFFORT THAT BUILT UPON A STRONG FOUNDATION LAID BY BAKER COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT'S TPEP.

USING LOCAL DATA AND ENGAGING PARTNERS

In 2013, a Baker County resident asked the City Council to consider a smoking ban in parks and other outdoor areas owned or controlled by the city. Concurrently, the local TPEP contacted the Baker City Parks & Recreation Department to assess their interest in having smokefree city parks. Parks & Recreation was amenable to the idea: the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board had recently surveyed Baker City residents about community parks and pathways, and what they had found was congruent with a smokefree policy.

Baker City residents told Parks & Recreation that they value and use their parks and pathways, particular Geiser Pollman and Central, which are located downtown. More than 9 in 10 survey respondents reported visiting Geiser Pollman in the past year and nearly 7 in 10 said they use the Leo Adler Memorial Pathway at least once a month for physical activity and recreational uses like photography, bird watching, and fishing. One Baker City resident summed up the value of the city's public spaces this way: "The parks and pathways are an essential part of the Baker City experience."

However, about 1 in 4 Baker City residents who responded to the survey said that various nuisance behaviors by other park patrons, including smoking, kept them from visiting their city parks more often.

In light of these findings, the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board expressed interest in the idea of smokefree parks. Other community partners, such as the Baker County Prevention Coalition, whose work focuses on reducing substance



abuse and creating a healthier and safer place to live, also endorsed the idea.

EDUCATING DECISION MAKERS AND FINDING CHAMPIONS

Baker City residents and City Councilors spent much of 2013 examining the evidence related to smokefree city parks. Residents sent letters to the City Council: some expressed resistance; many voiced support. A Baker City Herald Website poll showed a slight majority of readers in favor of the ordinance.

Baker County's TPEP Coordinator, Torie Andrews, prepared talking points and made several rounds of presentations to the Baker City Council to help them make an evidence-based decision about the proposed ordinance. Council members understood the dangers of tobacco, but enforcement of the proposed smokefree city parks ordinance was a sticking point. According to Andrews: "I knew regardless of how much or how many facts I presented, some of the council were going to vote against it...Some members had the mindset that one more ordinance isn't going to make a difference because no one will enforce it. I think that was one of the biggest challenges I had. In my experience, enforcement really isn't the issue; [compliance] will follow, people will learn."

Baker City Mayor, Kim Mosier, agreed that concerns about enforcement shouldn't overshadow the overall benefit of the ordinance to Baker City residents:

“ I don't pretend that everyone will stop smoking because of this, but my argument was 'if 70% fewer people are smoking in public places, isn't that better?' And people said the same thing about the seat belt law [being unenforceable]. Prevention efforts bear out over time. ”

After thoughtful deliberation and lively community engagement, the Baker City Council passed the smokefree parks ordinance 4-2 in January 2014.

EVALUATING THE POLICY AND HELPING WITH IMPLEMENTATION

Successful passage of the smokefree city parks ordinance in Baker City shows how work by Community Programs TPEP staff leads to increased knowledge and engagement by Oregonians to create healthier Oregon communities, but the work hasn't stopped there.

July is the busiest month for Baker City parks, and local TPEP staff wanted to know how well the smokefree city parks ordinance was working during the first summer after adoption. Were compliance and enforcement problems that could undermine the good intentions of the policy?

In order to answer this question, the local TPEP, with help from the Oregon Health Authority, conducted an observational assessment during Miner's Jubilee, a festival celebrating Baker City's mining heritage. The festival draws thousands of people to Geiser Pollman Park over the course of three days of events. Signs at park entrances and along the Leo Adler Memorial Pathway announce the new smokefree ordinance, but successful implementation of the policy mostly relies on the voluntary compliance of residents and visitors.

The assessment showed that six months after implementation, compliance with Baker City's new smokefree parks ordinance appears to be high. Among hundreds of people observed in Geiser Pollman Park during the observation periods, only four were smoking—none of whom were near the play area or Family Fun Center—and cigarette litter was minimal before, during, and after the festival. Observers saw more discarded cigarette butts along the Leo Adler Memorial Pathway than in the park, but observed no smoking.

THE POLICY APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN DETERRING SMOKING IN GEISER POLLMAN PARK, WHICH IS BAKER CITY'S MOST FREQUENTLY USED PARK, AND IN LIMITING IT ALONG THE LEO ADLER PATHWAY.



GROWING PUBLIC AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The activity that inspired the successful smokefree city parks ordinance is helping to build a movement for change in Baker City.

Baker County Health Department's TPEP Coordinator, Torie Andrews, says she can see people's attitudes changing in Baker County: "I think the biggest challenge in Baker County and with all rural counties, frankly, is the acceptance of tobacco use...as a community norm. Now, we are having a lot more businesses come and ask questions about tobacco prevention and smokefree policies... the outreach about the ordinance raised public awareness in the community!"

Stronger partnerships have blossomed since the ordinance passed. For example, TPEP has started partnering more closely with the Baker County Prevention Coalition to support the educational work conducted with adolescents in schools, and the Prevention Coalition has identified tobacco as one of the top three issues to address on its Action Plan.

MORE COMMUNITY MEMBERS STEP FORWARD TO ENACT VOLUNTARY POLICIES

Shortly after the smokefree city parks ordinance passed, the Baker City Library, which is adjacent to Geiser Pollman Park, passed its own comprehensive tobacco-free policy. Library Director Perry Stokes said members of the library district board of directors agreed at their Feb. 10th meeting to ban smoking, including e-cigarettes, and other tobacco use on library property, including the block surrounding the library's exterior. In July, Stokes said the policy is going well in its first year of implementation: "We've gotten nothing but compliments."



PRESERVING BAKER CITY'S LIVABILITY BY CREATING A CULTURE OF HEALTH

Today, 1 in 4 adults use tobacco in Baker County, but tomorrow could look different thanks to the efforts of engaged community members, working together with the local TPEP.

Says City Mayor, Kim Mosier: "I wanted people to smoke less around my kids. Teenagers in the park with skateboards and cigarettes look cool to children, but I don't want them to think smoking is an option for them."

Gary Dielman, library district board president, agreed, saying in the Baker City Herald: "[Smokefree policy] is better for everybody and certainly our youth—we don't want them taking up cigarette smoking or tobacco use on our premises and I agree with what the city did."

The smokefree city parks ordinance and voluntary policies, like the one passed by the library, help change social norms around smoking for children and teenagers.

Baker County TPEP Coordinator, Torie Andrews, agrees that Baker City's future looks promising: "TPEP is helping to create a culture of health by increasing areas where everyone can enjoy clean fresh air. I foresee the smokefree city parks ordinance creating a culture of health in so many aspects, and the more we continue this work, the bigger the expansion. I think it is a huge step for Baker City to have a policy like this."

“It's very powerful when citizens come up with their own initiatives... This is our community. If we can get a majority to agree, then we get to decide what our public spaces look like.”

—Kim Mosier,
Baker City Mayor