

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT  
ORDINANCE COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC HEARING  
JULY 6, 2015**

**ATTENDANCE:** Eneida Martinez, Co-chair; Enrique Torres, Melanie Jackson, Lydia Martinez, Council President Thomas McCarthy, José Casco (6:07 p.m.), AmyMarie Vizzo-Paniccia, Co-Chair (6:08 p.m.); Rev. Mary McBride-Lee (6:15 p.m.)

**CALL TO ORDER**

Council Member E. Martinez called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. A quorum was present. She introduced the members of the Committee seated.

**Proposed Amendments to the Municipal Code of Ordinances, Chapter 12.28 Park Use Regulations, amend to add new Section 12.28.210 Regulations Banning Smoking in City Parks.**

Council Member E. Martinez asked if there was anyone who wished to speak in favor of the proposed amendment.

*Council Member Casco joined the meeting at 6:07 p.m.*

Ms. Amanda Greer, a Bridgeport resident came forward with three other residents to speak about the parks and how having a ban on smoking in the parks would be helpful.

*Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia joined the meeting at 6:08 p.m.*

She said that there was a big jump in the number of middle school students and high school students smoking.

Ms. Brianna Watson came forward to speak about how she had been part of a team cleaning the parks and picked up a lot of cigarette butts from the ground. She also spoke to people that were in the park that day and all of them agreed that a ban on smoking in City parks would be good.

Mr. Richard Marcello came forward to speak about his support for the smoking ban.

A Bridgeport resident named Gene came forward to speak about his support of the smoking ban.

State Representative Steve Stafstrom (129th District) came forward in support of the ban and said that he had a statement to submit into the record. (See attached).

*Council Member McBride-Lee joined the meeting at 6:15 p.m.*

Council Member E. Martinez asked if there was anyone else present who wished to speak in favor of the ban. Hearing none, she asked if there was anyone present who wished to speak against the ban.

Mr. Ernie Newton came forward to speak against the ban. He then asked who would be monitoring the parks for the ban. He said that regardless of whether he liked smoking, he felt that people were going to smoke wherever they wanted to because enforcement would be difficult.

A Bridgeport resident came forward and said that the smokers were also taxpayers. The smokers pay taxes on the cigarettes when they buy them and then they will be banned from the parks. The City keeps making laws about different issues, but they don't have enough police officers to enforce the law.

Mr. Charles Covello came forward. He said that he was a smoker up until two years ago. When he was a smoker, he felt excluded when he had to stand outside of the building to have a cigarette. Now smoking won't be allowed in the parks. He pointed that the City can't control what happens in the parks now, never mind controlling cigarette smoking. The City should be working to stop the shootings rather than patrolling the parks for smokers.

Ms. Inez Martinez came forward and said that she was not a Bridgeport resident, but pays property taxes to Bridgeport. She said that she was a smoker and could understand why there were concerns about smoking near the playgrounds. She also pointed out that as an out of town resident, she pays \$20.00 whenever she goes to Seaside Park. However, the City can't control the drinking at the beach, never mind the people who may be smoking.

Council Member E. Martinez asked if there was anyone else who wished to speak against the ordinance. No one came forward. She repeated that two additional times. Hearing none, she closed the public hearing on the Regulations Banning Smoking in City Parks.

**Proposed Amendments to the Municipal Code of Ordinances, Chapter 8.80 Noise Control Regulations, amend Sections 8.80.020 Definitions and 8.80.050 Prohibited Noise Activities by adding new Subsection "C" (10). [96-14]**

Council Member E. Martinez asked if there was anyone who wished to speak in favor of the ordinance.

Mr. Melvin Vogel came forward and said that he was a Black Rock resident, and disabled veteran. He said that he was requesting reasonably quiet evenings. He submitted a statement (See attached). He said that some of the storefront businesses have their doors open and the customers are often out on the street in front of the businesses, talking loudly, swearing and making a ruckus late at night.

Another resident named Patricia came forward and said she lives in Black Rock and that she constantly hears the pounding music late at night. There are patrons leaving the bars at 1 a.m. There is often swearing and arguing outside. The music starts at 5 p.m. On July 3rd, the music was on all day when she was trying to prepare for an exam. The businesses open their doors and the music pours out, which means she can't open her windows.

Council Member E. Martinez asked if there was anyone else who wished to speak in favor of the ordinance. No one came forward. She repeated that two additional times.

Council Member E. Martinez asked if there was anyone who wished to speak against the ordinance. No one came forward. She repeated that two additional times. Hearing none, Council Member E. Martinez closed the public hearing on the Noise Control Regulations.

**Request that the taking of Vehicles and the action of "booting" must only be employed after multiple offenses and that a Certified Letter be submitted to the owners of Vehicle and that notice is provided to the appropriate City Council Committee for their Approval of said action.**

Council Member E. Martinez asked if there was anyone who wished to speak in favor of the ordinance

Mr. Ernie Newton came forward and thanked the Council for having the hearing. He then said that someone who had \$100 in late taxes could have their vehicle towed. It would cost the owner about \$400 to redeem the car, but most of the money goes to the contractors. The City gets very little. He said that contracts over a certain amount must be approved by the City Council. Mr. Newton said that the City Attorney was a good lawyer but was not God. The City Attorney should stop treating the Council Members as children. He pointed out that the Council Members should be reviewing the contracts that are being signed. The Council Members are the residents' representatives. He said that when he gets up in the morning, there are many vehicles booted in his neighborhood.

Ms. Joyce Jones came forward to speak about her SUV which was towed and has been sold. She said that she had been paying the debt. She waited for the Committee Members to answer her question about what she could do. Council Member Vizzo-Paniccia explained that the Council Members could not respond to the public during a public hearing and suggested that she contact her District representative to discuss her situation further.

Mr. Charles Coviello came forward and said that this ordinance was hurting the City. He said that one of his customers called in tears because she couldn't pay the \$106.00 in fines and ended up almost losing her house because of the fines. He said that it was not right for the Tax Collector or the Mayor should do this. He said that the booting was done on Sunday nights. He said that this was the ability to survive for many people. After that, he read in the papers that the City does not make that much money, but the City destroys peoples' livelihoods and jobs.

Another resident came forward to speak about the booting program. He said that the City now informs the owner what the vehicle is worth. There is no way that the City should be able to take the vehicle away from the owner and sell it when the owner is still paying taxes on the vehicle. The residents should have a chance to stand before a judge to present their cases. This is car jacking and Grand Theft Auto. This is illegal in the United States. He said that he left his vehicle in his driveway and had been out of town on business and came back to find his vehicle gone. It had been towed from his property while he was away.

City Sheriff David Goodman, another Bridgeport resident, came forward and said that the boot program could work, but it was being done incorrectly. He said that if a vehicle is taken, the City should be the first lien holder. The taxpayers get burned over and over and over again. He suggested that the taxpayers should band together to sue the City.

Ms. Ernestine Moore came forward and said that she wanted to bear witness to the process. She said that she parked in the wrong place at an event and the vehicle was towed. She said that there had been a number of questionable actions on the part of the towing company.

Mr. John Ortiz, the owner of City Line Auto Body, and a resident came forward and said that he had been on the tow list in the past. He felt that the program was being run incorrectly. He added that he had not resigned, he had been told to leave the program. Ms. Kelly-Lenz wouldn't know that, though. The current towing company because it is the problem. The outside booting company is making the money, not the City. Mr. Ortiz suggested that people who have their cars towed for owing taxes get a 15-day period to pay what they owe and get their cars back without further penalty and fees. He said that someone who knows the law should be running the program. Ms. Kelly-Lenz isn't as well versed in the laws to know how to do this.

Council Member Martinez asked if there was anyone who wished to speak against the ordinance. No one came forward. She repeated that two additional times. Hearing none, Council Member E. Martinez closed the public hearing on the request regarding the booting of vehicles.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Council Member E. Martinez closed the public hearing at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

S. L. Soltes  
Telesco Secretarial Services