

City of Pascagoula - Smoke-Free Policy
Public Comment Report - May 15, 2013

In 2013, several citizens voiced concerns about the harmful effects of secondhand smoke that they would encounter in the restaurants and bars in Pascagoula. Additionally Kelly Lamb, Health Promotions Coordinator with the Mississippi Tobacco Free Coalition, for Jackson County approached the City Council about the health risks involved with being exposed to secondhand smoke. Pascagoula then applied for and was awarded the Smoke-Free Policies Technical Assistance Grant through the Mississippi State Department of Health. This grant provided funding that allowed the City to gather the public comments on adopting a Smoke-Free Policy.

Public hearings regarding the Smoke-Free Policy were scheduled. Advertisements were published April 7th and April 12th in the Sun Herald and the Mississippi Press. WLOX ran news reports on Thursday, March 28, 2013, and Thursday, April 18, 2013. Notices were sent to all Anchor Square and Main Street Merchants. Notices were posted multiple times on Facebook. The advertisements, news reports, and notices made residents aware of opportunities to submit comments on the potential Smoke-Free Policy by calling or emailing the Community and Economic Development Department or attending the public meetings. The Department accepted comments throughout the advertisements, meeting times and for six additional business days beyond that.

The first public hearing held Tuesday, April 16th, during a City Council Meeting focused on comments from the general public. Seven people commented at this hearing. Three people were not in favor of the Smoke-Free Policy. One of the citizens who opposed the Smoke-Free Policy requested that if the Policy passes that e-cigarettes be excluded from the ordinance. One person's opinion was not clear. There were two people who were in favor of a comprehensive Smoke-Free Policy. A man commented that the proposed policy stepped on his freedom is a step towards socialism, and would strain the police department with enforcement efforts. A business owner claimed that two of his employees had already quit in anticipation of a Smoke-Free Policy and said that when he polled his patrons 90% said that they would take their business outside of Pascagoula. Aimee Barresi, Grass Roots Advocate with Smoke-Free Mississippi, provided several statistics demonstrating the harmfulness of smoking. Ms. Lamb noted that the ordinance did not include sidewalks or public streets, but instead focused on indoor facilities. She went on to say that no businesses have closed in any of the 67 Mississippi cities that have passed an ordinance and in some cases revenues have increased. Another business owner stated that he made the decision to make his business smoke-free and has received positive feedback from smokers and non-smokers about the decision.

The second public hearing held Thursday, April 18th, at the Pascagoula Seniors Center focused on business owners. Eleven people commented at this hearing. Five people stopped by the meeting to register their opinion in favor of the policy, but did not stay for the meeting. Six people attended the business owners' public hearing; five of which were in favor of a full smoke-free policy. One person said that they hated smoke but did not feel like the government has the right to regulate smoking in public. Another person called attention to the fact that because very few people attended the hearing, many must believe that it is not a big deal and urged the Council to pass the policy. He further went on to say, "The Council and Mayor were elected to provide leadership and that is what they need to do. They need to take the reins and pass this." A woman commented that she had grown up with parents who

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smoked and married a man who smoked. She stated that everyone has the right to avoid second hand smoke and wanted a comprehensive ordinance.

The Community and Economic Development Department accepted comments through Friday, April 26th. During that time 17 calls were received of which 13 were in favor of a Smoke-Free Policy and four were against. Two emails were received and one against and one in favor of a Smoke-Free Policy. Several of the 19 people who contacted the Department elaborated on their opinions. The following comments are reflective of the information they provided. Two people had concerns with how the policy would be enforced. Two other people voiced concerns about smoking in public places where children are present. Three people called on behalf of the rights of business owners to make their own decisions. Another three people specifically requested a comprehensive Smoke-Free Policy. One person with asthma who has parents and a husband who smoke commented that non-smokers can decide whether or not they want to give their business to places that allow smoking. Three people who were directly or indirectly affected by heart problems or cancer commented in favor of a Smoke-Free Policy.

In conclusion as a result of citizens concerns, the City of Pascagoula applied for funding to gauge public opinion on the adoption of a comprehensive or partial Smoke-Free Policy. Advertisements for public comments were placed in newspapers and aired on WLOX news. There were two public hearing at which business owners and the public voiced comments. Comments were also received through phone calls and emails to the Community and Economic Development Department. Public comments were tallied for a Smoke-Free Policy. The results were 27 in favor, nine against, and one unclear.

27 In Favor Smoke-Free Policy = 73%
9 Against Smoke-Free Policy = 24%
1 Unclear = 3%
37 Total Number of Comments Received = 100%

