

Case Example: Changing the Smoking Ordinance in Smithtown

Jane has been the public health director in Smithtown for 10 years, appointed by the mayor. During her tenure, Smithtown's population has grown from 25,000 to 43,000 residents. A decade ago, there was only a single diner and one fast food restaurant in Smithtown. Along with this growth in population growth, there has been growth in industry, including numerous restaurants and bars.

In 2004, Jane approached the Mayor about strengthening the existing ordinance regarding smoking in these establishments to protect the health of patrons and workers. The Mayor was convinced that the time had come and suggested that Jane approach the City Council for a change in ordinance to ban smoking from all establishments serving food and beverages within the city limits.

Jane knew two of the council members, having worked with them for many years. The others were newer and less familiar, just nearing the end of their first term and facing re-election in the next several months. Jane left the meeting unclear whether all of the council members understood the importance of the proposal or whether their apparent lack of engagement and support was related to other factors.

The proposal went to committee. After not hearing anything for a few weeks, Jane approached them again and was told it was still in committee and under review. In November, Jane became involved in a case of meningitis among two teenage workers at a local fast food establishment and in organizing the city's annual flu vaccine clinics. Once things quieted down again and as the new year approached, Jane was clear that the council would not act on the ordinance. She was left trying to decide what to do next.

Obstacles:

- **Public pressure:** Industry stakeholders who may not want a change in smoking ordinance due to anticipated impact on their business and smokers who may not want such a change in ordinance
- **Strength of relationships with people in power:** Jane did not have relationships with all the council members; It's not clear how strong her relationships are with those she knows well either.
- **Politics/influence:** Members are up for re-election and may face political pressure from those opposing the change in ordinance
- **Understanding of public health:** Council members may not understand Jane's role/function of public health director or the importance of the changes she proposed
- **Crisis/demand for limited resources:** In this case, Jane's attention has been pulled away to address something else so could not follow up on the issue the way she might have liked.



Cambridge Public Health Department
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