

METROPOLIS PLANET

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Hope Light Foundation recognizes city for tobacco, vaping ban in parks

BY TERRA TEMPLE

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After three years of the city as the host site of a cancer walk/health fair at Dorothy Miller Park, Metropolis Mayor Greg Jeffords said he was sitting in on a debriefing where it was mentioned that “looking at cigarette butts while doing a cancer walk is counterproductive.”

That discussion also noted how several parks in

Southern Illinois are completely smoke and vape free.

And it got Jeffords to thinking.

“We already ban it in our sports complex. Why would we not want to do it in our city’s parks?” he said.

The Metropolis City Council quickly approved the ban, which applies to

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A sign at the main entrance to Dorothy Miller Park reminds patrons that no smoking, no tobacco products and no vaping are allowed in the city park located on the Ohio River. The Metropolis City Council passed an ordinance in November 2025 making all of its city parks and city recreational areas tobacco-free. The signs, which were posted last week in all 16 of the city’s parks, are provided by the Southern Illinois Tobacco Disparities Partnership and funded by an Illinois Department of Public Health grant through funds received from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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all the city’s parks and recreational areas, passed the official ordinance on Nov. 24, 2025.

That action was recognized Monday, April 20, as six organizations — Southern Illinois Tobacco Disparities Partnership, or SITDP; Southern Illinois Tobacco Prevention Partnership, or SITPP; Massac Memorial Hospital; Southern Seven Health Department; Rural Health Inc. and the Hope Light Foundation — presented Jeffords the Hope Light Award for Excellence. The ceremony was held at Dorothy Miller Park, the first of the city’s 16 parks to received the “Welcome to our tobacco-free property” sign, which reminds visitors

that smoking, vaping, electronic smoking devices or use of any tobacco products are prohibited on the properties.

“Mayor, it’s my honor to be here with you and thank you for putting this park, and all the other city parks in Metropolis, off limits to smoking, vaping and tobacco products,” Bess said as he presented the award.

Jeffords emphasized he was accepting the Hope Light Award for Excellence on behalf of the city.

“This is not mine,” he said of the award. “I just came up with the idea. The council voted on it.”

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The Hope Light Award for Excellence recognizes individuals who make significant

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On behalf of the Metropolis City Council, Mayor, Greg Jeffords accepts the Hope Light Award for Excellence from Rudy Bess, who made the presentation on behalf of the Southern Illinois Tobacco Disparities Partnership, the Southern Illinois Tobacco Prevention Partnership, Massac Memorial Hospital, Southern Seven Health Department, Rural Health Inc. and the Hope Light Foundation. Bess is the founding director of the Hope Light Foundation. The presentation was made Monday, April 20, at Dorothy Miller Park.

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contributions to and/or consistently demonstrate excellence in the fight against cancer that is considered above and beyond all norms and expectations for an individual's job assignment or voluntary service. The award consists of a framed certificate and a round crystal award.

The presentation certificate to Jeffords recognizes "your demonstrated excellence and dedication to reducing the burden of tobacco-related cancers by making all Metropolis City Parks off-limits to cigarette smoking, vaping and smokeless tobacco."

"Tobacco-free parks policies contribute to the denormalization of smoking, supporting attitudes and views of smoking as outside typical healthy behavior. Additionally, they reduce litter from cigarette butts and other tobacco products," Bess said.

The Hope Light Foundation was begun by Bess and his wife Beverly in 2005 with a two-fold mission: communicating cancer awareness information to impact cancer prevention, cancer victim survivorship and saving lives and to promote cancer education and research.

A symbol of that mission is the Hope Light lighthouse. A symbol of hope to those affected by cancer, it was erected in 2014 by the foundation in Dorothy Miller Park. The first lighthouse on the Ohio River, the Besses, who live in Hazelwood, Missouri, wanted it erected in their hometown of Metropolis.

"We at Hope Light appreciate what you've done in getting this



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Members of five organizations — Southern Illinois Tobacco Disparities Partnership, or SITDP; Southern Illinois Tobacco Prevention Partnership, or SITPP; Southern Seven Health Department, Rural Health Inc. and the Hope Light Foundation — recognized the City of Metropolis on Monday, April 20, for its efforts in making its parks and recreational areas tobacco and smoke free. Pictured making the presentation to Mayor Gregg Jeffords are, from left, Cindy Johnson, representing SITDP; Angie Bailey, SITDP chair; Rudy Bess, Hope Light Foundation founding director; Carrie Eldridge, SITPP chair; Natalie Sawyer, representing Southern Seven; and Shawna Rhine, representing Rural Health Inc.

thing done," Bess told Jeffords. "What you've done will have a big impact. We also want to extend our thanks to the city council."

Bess said the City of Metropolis is being recognized by the foundation and its five partners because "tobacco is the leading preventable cause of more than 12 types of cancer. It's more than just lung cancer. Approximately 40% of all cancer diagnoses are due to tobacco use."

He shared several tobacco-related statistics from the National Cancer Institute involving Massac County. Of the state's adult smokers, ages 18 and over, 16.1%, or 1,737, are in Massac County. Based on the current CDC data, the county has 12 deaths per year due to lung cancer, with the death rate at 54.9. The new cases of lung cancer per year is 16, meaning the county has an incidence rate of 72. Of those 16 cases, 10

are diagnosed in the late stages, which is 65%; the state average is 66% and the national is 64%.

Angie Bailey is the SITDP chair and the director of community health for Southern Illinois Healthcare in Carbondale. The goal of SITDP is to reduce tobacco disparities throughout the lower 16 counties by using evidence-based research and creating policy systems and environmental changes in Southern Illinois.

"This is a great example of a policy and environmental change," Bailey said of the city's ban. "It's really going to reduce exposure to secondhand smoke and reduce those number of individuals who are seeing others smoke and vape. Reducing youth exposure and targeting populations with higher rates of tobacco use are a really important part of the work we do."

Bailey added that the posted "Welcome to our

tobacco-free property" signs are provided by SITDP and funded by an Illinois Department of Public Health grant through funds received from the CDC.

SITPP is another regional effort. Carrie Eldridge, with the Jackson County Health Department, is the SITPP chair. Her job focus is vaping prevention, especially educating youth of its dangers. She noted that the aerosol that comes out of the vape has the same chemicals that can cause lung cancer, throat cancer and other types of cancer. Vapes are not biodegradable, so when not disposed of properly, they are also harming the environment. Vaping can also lead to tobacco use.

"Putting the parks off-limits to tobacco use is a good thing for the community that would be a good heads-up to our younger generation and for generations to come," Bess said.

"Cigarettes, vaping and chewing tobacco are hazardous to you and your friends' health both in private and in public. Both cigarettes and vaping products contain nicotine, cause respiratory problems, produce potentially harmful substances and both lead to nicotine addiction. Cigarette smoke poses significant risks to bystanders. Vaping produces aerosol, which is less harmful, but not risk-free."

According to the Metropolis ordinance, "the city council has determined that smoking and vaping in public parks and recreational areas creates environmental concerns, including litter from cigarette butts and vaping materials, and increases the risk of fire."

The ordinance defines:

- Smoking as "inhaling, exhaling, burning or carrying any lighted or heated cigar, cigarette, pipe, hookah or any other lighted or heated

tobacco or plant product for inhalation."

- Vaping as "the use of any electronic cigarette, electronic smoking device, vape pen or similar device that delivers nicotine or other substances to the person inhaling from the device."

- And, city park or recreational area as "any property owned, leased or operated by the City of Metropolis for public recreation, including, but not limited to, playgrounds, sports fields, walking trails, picnic shelters, the city pool, splash park and any associated parking lots or structures."

The ordinance is enforced by the Metropolis Police Department, the Parks Department and other authorized city officials. Any person found in violation is subject to a fine not less than \$25 and not more than \$100 for each offense. Each day a violation continues shall constitute a separate offense.

"This ban makes sense for us. It is a good policy when thinking of our community spaces and making them as family friendly as possible," Jeffords said. "Our park system is a showcase and one of the best ways to promote our city. We want to make our parks family friendly — a place where a child isn't exposed to secondhand smoke or picking up a disposed of e-cigarette — and this is the easy way to do that. This keeps our parks clean and everybody around us healthy. The council and I want our parks to be as inviting and clean as can be made with our resources. This ban is a very low cost [action] that has a high impact on the community as a whole."