



New smoking regs get mixed review

Pub owners split on effect on business

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THE province's new restrictions on smoking in public, due to come into effect Monday, are getting mixed reviews from North Shore pub owners, who say the changes — while not major — are one more step toward banning smoking in their establishments altogether.

The amendments to British Columbia's Tobacco Sales Act — now called the Tobacco Control Act — ban smoking within three metres of most public doorways, open windows and air intakes. They also prohibit lighting up in most "fully or substantially enclosed" public places. That means specially ventilated smoking rooms and some closed-in patios are now out of bounds.

While the new law is unlikely to put a serious dent in business, it may not bode well for the future, said John Kavanagh, owner of Horseshoe Bay's Troller Pub. If legislation continues in the same direction, smokers may be driven from the Troller's 20-seat patio, and that may affect business.

"(The patio's) the refuge now," he said. "If you disenfranchise 22 per cent of your customer base, will that affect your business? Yeah."

When smoking was banned in West Vancouver bars in 2000, the Troller suffered a significant downturn in sales, he said. Being so close to the ferry, the pub draws the bulk of its clientele from outside the municipality, so the ban drove many customers to Gibson's and other areas that didn't fall under the same umbrella.

Business didn't recover until 2004, said Kavanagh. He fears an outright ban on patios could lead to another dip.

That said, he recognizes why the law is changing. "Is it a positive for health reasons and for staff? Yeah," he said.

Bob Savage, co-owner of North Vancouver's Rusty Gull



NEWS photo Terry Peters

BLACK Bear Neighbourhood Pub owner Ron Singer sits in his Lynn Valley watering hole's soon-to-be smoke-free patio. New provincial smoking restrictions coming Monday will likely have minimal impact on many North Shore taverns, but Slinger is taking the opportunity to eliminate smoking from his premises altogether.

TransLink increases property taxation

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TRANSLINK's new board of directors voted on Friday to raise property tax rates and create a replacement for an unpopular tax on parking stalls that was scrapped late last year.

Homeowners will feel a small pinch in their pocketbooks, but the tax increases will mainly affect business properties.

Under the new formula, residential property taxes collected for TransLink will go up 2.6 per cent in 2008. For the average North Shore homeowner, that means an increase of about \$10

dollars on their \$1,072,000 home.

"It obviously hits the North Shore unfairly; our assessments are way higher than the regional value," said West Vancouver Coun. Michael Smith. "I don't know whether or not there's anything we can do about it, beside register our protest, I guess."

Business owners will take a double hit in the property tax department. They'll see rates increase by the same 2.6 per cent. That translates to \$24 more in taxes for every \$500,000 of assessed value.

In addition, a new replacement tax, which will only be applied to business properties, is intended to address a shortfall

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Just ban smoking in public says pub owner

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Neighbourhood Pub, shares Kavanagh's prediction.

"The City of North Vancouver . . . and probably a lot of other municipalities are looking at making further changes," said Savage. Among those will likely be a patio ban, he said.

If that happens, the Gull will probably come out OK, said Savage, but it will affect his clientele.

"I would say most of our patrons are non-smokers, but the ones who do smoke are long-time regular customers," he said. For some, daily get-togethers on the patio appear to be their only social outlet.

"I don't know what they would do," said Savage.

Lynn Valley's Black Bear Neighbourhood Pub, also smelling change on the wind, is taking a different tack. Even though Monday's legislation stops short of driving smoke from patios completely, the pub is going to go ahead with a ban anyway.

"We are going to be totally non-smoking,"

said owner Ron Slinger. That includes the pub's 400-square-foot patio.

"If you think I'm confident, I'm not. I'm concerned," he said. "But I hope the people who have supported us . . . will continue to support us and understand we've made a decision with great trepidation but with some optimism."

Slinger feels most of his customers will get behind the idea, as they did when smoking was banned in the pub's indoor areas.

"I tell you, I feel in my heart our business grew almost instantly," he said. "Our food volume grew."

In fact, the provincial changes coming Monday don't go far enough, said Slinger. The province seems to be pushing toward a smoking ban in all public places. If it would just do it outright, and make it consistent across the board, the patchwork of municipal restrictions that has plagued businesses over the past few years could be done away with, he said.

"The province who wants this should be making the decision," said Slinger.

"They bunted again. I think it's the nicest, politest way I can say it to you."



photo Roy Warner

Hard a-port

A boathouse under construction at the Mosquito Creek Marina tipped over Easter Sunday while owners worked on adding a new level to the top. It is currently being taken down to avoid further damage. The five people inside at the time of the incident were rescued by marina security personnel. No one was injured.

Businesses may pay more next year

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of approximately \$18 million that TransLink had formerly planned to raise by taxing business parking stalls.

That tax was nixed by the province in December after an outcry from business groups across the Lower Mainland.

For 2008, TransLink has opted to gather only half of

that tax deficit, meaning that business owners will pay \$72 for every \$500,000 of assessed value. That value could rise steeply next year, if the transit authority decides to collect on the full \$18 million.

The replacement tax was the subject of a public hearing on March 17 in Burnaby, attended by about 50 interested property owners.

The board had originally considered applying the replacement tax to both residential and business properties, but decided against that proposal after hearing from tax-weary homeowners.

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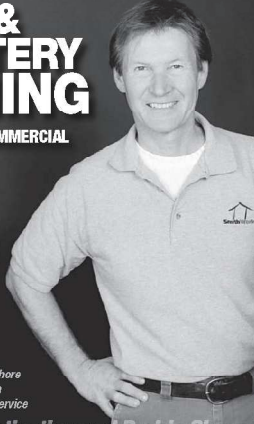
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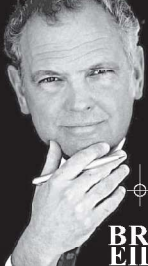
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