

OUR VIEW: City should think long and hard on smoke ban

By Murf Raquet, for the editorial board

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The Moscow City Council soon will take up discussion on the proposed ban on smoking in bars.

We hope members will be deliberate in their discussions and not act in the same hasty manner in which the proposal appears to have been made.

That is not to say we are opposed to such a ban. We believe nonsmokers have the right to be in a bar without having to breathe secondhand smoke.

We feel, however, that it is a function of the state to enact such a ban as it did a few years ago in banning smoking in public places, including restaurants.

The state, for whatever reason, left it up to the various municipalities to create their own statutes if they wanted stricter nonsmoking laws.

This plan, of course, absolved legislators from having to mess with the status quo of many of the bars in the state - a last refuge kinda thing.

In leaving such decisions to the cities, the state could become a hodge-podge of smoking and nonsmoking bars, and that makes little sense. All that does is force some smokers to go to another city to smoke and drink - and then drive home.

Banning smoking in bars - and perhaps private clubs - will have an effect on the business. It may increase business with an influx of nonsmokers or it could drive smokers away if they have to go outside to light up.

The City Council needs to take its time and consider carefully the ramifications of forcing businesses to make a radical change at a time of economic uncertainty when those businesses are most vulnerable.

Like it or not there is a lot of tax money - sales and sin - generated in bars. Bars are a contributing part of the business community.

Until the state steps in, we would like to see the market dictate whether a bar goes smokeless.

Consumers wield power with their dollars and bar owners could make the change to smoke-free if enough nonsmokers stay away from the business.

We see no hurry to impose a smoking ban before the whole state is ready for it. Besides, forcing smokers to go outside to light up can create a new problem on the sidewalks and alleys where smokers gather and puff away as pedestrians pass by.