

Smoking Ban Debate

## Nitro Wants to Form City Health Department

Reported by: Leslie Rubin

Reported: Dec. 9, 2010, 10:20 PM EST

Updated: Dec. 9, 2010, 11:10 PM EST

The smoking ban debate rages on, as leaders in one city meet in an effort to break away from the rules of the Kanawha County Health Department.

Nitro City Council say their city is losing millions of dollars in business revenue because of Kanawha County's smoking ban. Their solution: be the first city in the state to form their very own health department, with their very own set of rules.

Nitro is at it again. After a failed attempt to put itself under the jurisdiction of the Putnam County Health Department, they have a new plan.

"We don't really feel like we have much of a say. So, we have an unelected, appointed board making decisions that affect the livelihood of people in Nitro. We feel like the folks of Nitro would like to have a more local say of what's going on inside city limits," explains Nitro councilman Craig Matthews.

They say what's going on is a losing game.

"Our business has dropped tremendously," says Kenneth Allison.

Allison works at the Nitro Moose Lodge. He says members are dropping like flies, and it's simply because they can't light up under the Kanawha County smoking ban.

"Most of the people we call, to try and get them back, that's one of the reasons they say. When they bring smoking back, they might come back," says Allison.

But Nitro says nothing is hurting more than the losses at the Mardi Gras Casino and Resort. Losses to the tune of \$10 million a year.

"We think it's in the best interest of the city of Nitro and we support it," says Dan Adkins, with the casino.

But some people in Nitro aren't on board with the extra expense a city health department would cost them.

"I don't need it, I don't want it, and I don't think it would be fair to the citizens that do not smoke," says Susan Davis.

Mayor Rusty Casto says it's essential to him to keep costs low for the citizens.

"I don't want to put any more burden on the Nitro taxpayers. I'd rather be paving roads and giving raises to our employees and fixing the town up," says Mayor Casto.

A staple in Nitro for decades, Diehl's Family Restaurant owner Keith Diehl says the smoking ban has helped his business, but he's not against bringing it back in other places in the city.

"If you could emphasize something where myself as a non-smoker, could still go and enjoy the dog track or whatever it is and not have to be right beside somebody that's smoking, you know, what the heck?" says Diehl.

The City Ordinance Committee has called a special meeting for next Thursday to further discuss wording of the ordinance.

They'll present it to council at a meeting on December 21.

If all goes according to plan, council hopes to have a final vote in February.