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Butt-ban decision bogs down

City council takes smoke break as wrangling stalls verdict on fast-tracking bylaw

By SHAWN LOGAN, CALGARY SUN

The prospects of Calgary going smoke free by 2007 could be doused today if city council continues to be bogged down by a hazy debate, the alderman who led the charge for the butt ban said.

Council failed to reach a decision on the drawn-out controversy last night but is expected to end it today.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, who spearheaded the move to fast-track calls for a smoke free Calgary by a year, said she is concerned the bylaw could be extinguished with fellow aldermen pushing for changes to the ban after a lengthy debate.

She said one of her allies, Ald. Bob Hawkesworth, won't be in attendance today and plans to move the bylaw to 2007 could be in jeopardy.

"I don't think we've got the votes," she said yesterday after city council decided to break for the night after failing to make a decision.

"Hopefully there's enough votes to go back to the original plan so at least we can get (the ban in place by) '08."

Hawkesworth said council voted 10-5 in July to fast-track the plan and he doesn't believe his absence will change council's will.

"I don't see that this endangers bringing that goal-line closer by a year," he said.

As city council debated plans to move up a plan to snuff out smoking in public places a year ahead of schedule, some wrangled over the future of charity bingos.

Ald. Dale Hodges said forcing bingos to butt out would punish them and any bylaw outlawing smoking should exclude them.

"Bingos are the lifeblood of non-profit organizations," he said. "For swimming clubs and a variety of non-profit groups this is their main source of funding or their only source of funding."

While the proposed bylaw would end smoking in bars and restaurants by Jan. 1, 2007, it would allow businesses with smoking rooms to use the facilities until 2008.

Ald. Druh Farrell said plans to allow bingos to keep smoking should be doused along with smoking rooms in 2008 via a sunset clause, a motion narrowly passed by council.

But Ald. Gord Lowe said council could get burned by getting hung up in the details and should return to its original plan to outlaw smoking across the city in 2008.

"I can't help but wonder whether this is all smoke and mirrors," Lowe said. "I really don't understand what we're doing here -- this is so badly flawed."

Council will resume the debate today.