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Honorable Council:

I am glad that the Council requested that Cambridge Public Health come up with alternatives to the proposed amendments to the Tobacco Ordinance, but I am opposed to them even as outlined under Option B. There is simply no reason to ban smoking in public parks at all.

Cambridge Public Health claims that under Option B, smoking would only be banned in 10% of Cambridge parks. This statement is misleading because as far as I can tell, this 10% refers to a percentage of the total square footage of all Cambridge public parks put together, not 10% of the number of parks seen as individual entities. Seen as individual entities, it appears smoking would be banned in 13 out the 66 public parks in Cambridge, or about 20% of the total number of parks. This is not even including tot lots where smoking would be banned, when smokers are generally not coming into playgrounds to smoke anyway. The public perception would be that smoking is banned in a great number of parks, many of them close to the most active areas of Cambridge and those frequented most by the homeless.

I feel that this also opens the door to allow greater prohibitions- it will be much easier to ban smoking in all public parks in the future, if this precedent is set. Smokers have already been forced outdoors almost everywhere. They are not allowed to smoke inside any bars or cafes, and it is becoming increasingly common for them not to be allowed to smoke inside their own apartments anymore. And now they'll be made to feel like lepers at 20% of the parks in the city, which will only add to their feeling of alienation. I am sure it won't be long before Cambridge Public Health will claim that they are receiving complaints about people smoking on sidewalks, so that will have to be banned too. Where is this going to end?

Also, under Option B, smoking would be banned in the very few remaining outdoor patios where it is still voluntarily allowed by the owners. These patios are private property and customers can decide whether to patronize them or not. In fact, many smokers now choose to patronize these bars because they like being able to socialize and have a drink in the nice weather while smoking. Also, many homeless and marginalized people frequent patios such as Au Bon Pain, where they are able to drink coffee and sit and talk and smoke. Why place further restrictions on private property, when there is no public health reason for doing so?

I want to repeat something Massachusetts State Representative Marjorie Decker said at the council meeting on 12/15/14, because it is very significant. She admitted that the proposals to ban smoking in Cambridge public parks and patios is not about protecting nonsmokers from harm. She said, and I quote, "I don't think we should couch this as a danger of secondhand smoking... it is about setting and establishing healthy, contagious behaviors. That's what this is about."

Marjorie Decker, and Cambridge Public Health, know that there is no danger from secondhand smoke, particularly outdoors. They just want to control our behavior and promote intolerance because it suits their agenda.

I ask again- Is this really something that we sanction as a society, enacting laws equivocally to change behavior through social engineering?