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Media Contact: Elisa Weaver, Director of Community & Personnel Services

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SIERRA MADRE CITY COUNCIL PASSES NEW NON-SMOKING REGULATIONS

After careful consideration of established scientific studies on the health and environmental hazards of tobacco use and second-hand smoke, the Sierra Madre City Council has adopted Ordinance 1291, which prohibits smoking in the outdoor dining or patio areas of any public place where food and/or beverages are sold or served, and on the grounds of any City government-owned building or facility where food or beverages are consumed. The Ordinance will go into effect May 26, 2009.

The ordinance is first and foremost a safety measure intended to minimize the public's passive exposure to tobacco smoke and its known health threats. It also seeks to protect children from smoking's inherent dangers and to deter them from associating smoking with a fit lifestyle. Its adjunct purpose is environmental protection, to reduce tobacco-related litter and pollution on City property and outdoor dining facilities. With this ordinance, the City is following the lead of a growing number of California cities that have similarly addressed this important quality-of-life issue.

While the health risks of smoking were not in dispute during public discussions, concerns were raised as to the potential loss of business revenue should smokers no longer patronize local establishments. Research was undertaken to assess the economic impact experienced by neighboring communities that have enacted similar measures.

The City solicited information from Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, and Calabasas, regarding the financial impact equivalent smoking regulations have had on their communities. Each city reported that input from their local businesses revealed that next to no revenue was lost as a result of an open-air smoking ban. The economic impact was, in fact, positive, as more elderly, families and non-smokers were seen to increase their patronage, thus outweighing any revenue that might have been lost from smokers who no longer frequented completely smoke-free establishments. The cities surveyed also indicated that they have received very few complaints regarding the smoking regulations.

Ordinance 1291 will require all restaurants, bars, cafés and delis in Sierra Madre to post no-smoking signs, remove ashtrays, and for employees to remind patrons not to smoke. The City is still in the process of considering appropriate enforcement procedures, and as such, warnings as of May 26 will be issued until further notice, to allow sufficient time for businesses and patrons to adjust to the new regulations.

Copies of Ordinance 1291 are available for review at Sierra Madre City Hall and the Sierra Madre Public Library as well as online at www.cityofsierramadre.com. For more information, please contact the Sierra Madre Police Department at 626-355-1414.