Public places smoking ban OK’d in Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES — Restrictions on smoking in public buildings, public meetings and the private workplace have been approved on a 4-0 vote of the Lake Charles City Council, with two members abstaining.

Mayor Ed Watson has 10 days to decide whether to veto the measure, which was approved Wednesday.

Under the ordinance, which would be enforced by the Lake Charles Fire Department’s fire safety division, designated smoking zones would be set up in public buildings and private workplaces.

The seven-page ordinance was modeled after a similar ordinance passed last year in New Orleans.

During Wednesday’s meeting, the council heard from spokesmen on both sides of the issue, including a scientist from Grand Rapids, Mich., who was sent by the Tobacco Institute to speak against the ban.

Councilman David Painter, author of the ordinance, said he thinks “reasonable smokers” won’t have a problem with the smoking restrictions, but “die-hard smokers” certainly won’t like the ordinance.

Council member Chuck MacPherson said that, while there are valid arguments on both sides, the bottom line is that the ordinance is “in the best interest of the public.”

He added that he feels the ordinance will have little financial impact on businesses such as restaurants or offices.

Leonard Knapp Jr. of the American Lung Association said that other American cities already have ordinances pertaining to smoking.

“We think that this is not an intrusion into individual citizens’ rights,” Knapp said. “I think that we have a right and a duty to protect the public’s health.”