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## A bid for decent exposure

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 3 2011

By [David Sachs](#)

New mother Karyn Blanc rarely breast-feeds in public, but when she does it's usually trouble-free — and two local elected officials want to keep it that way.

"I haven't ever run into a problem," she said, stopping by St. Elmo's Coffee Pub earlier this week with her five-month-old daughter. "I would personally rather choose privacy, but you can find yourself in a situation without an option."

Blanc has never run afoul of the city's indecent exposure ordinance, which considers "the showing of the female breast with less than a fully opaque covering of any portion thereof below the top of the nipple" a class one misdemeanor.

While Vice Mayor Kerry Donley and City Councilman Rob Krupicka don't know of any mothers charged for violating the law, they want to amend it to legalize public breast-feeding. Krupicka said the current law is outdated.

"Lets clean up this old ordinance," he said. "We want to be a family friendly city. Having this on the books doesn't make sense ... It's shouldn't be on the books anymore."

Changing the indecent exposure ordinance to exempt breast-feeding would bring Alexandria in line with a similar exemption in state law.

Krupicka and Donley stumbled across the ordinance after staffers complained City Hall lacks any private areas for working mothers to breast-feed. They're taking a three-pronged approach to the issue: rewriting city law, adopting a policy to make it easier for employees to breast-feed and promoting its benefits.

Changes to the Fair Labor Standards Act in 2010 require employers give mothers breaks to express milk, but Alexandria doesn't have a policy in place to meet the federal mandate. Krupicka and Donley have teamed up with the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria to find a solution.

Breast-feeding has been shown to reduce the risk of childhood obesity, said Carrie Fesperman Redden, health planner with the partnership. A 2007 Inova Hospital survey found more than 40 percent of Alexandria's children and teens were overweight.

"We were already working on thinking about how to support breast-feeding in Alexandria, how to support mothers of all income levels in working toward breast-feeding at whatever level they think they can do," she said. "The first step is really having a city that has a strong statement that supports breast-feeding."

Krupicka also cites the health benefits of breast milk. Breast-feeding builds immunities in children and



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reduces the risk of breast cancer. Promoting breast-feeding is consistent with the city's commitment to health, he said.

"I think it's a good chance to demonstrate our commitment to community health and our commitment to families and get rid of an old, antiquated law, he said."

Zorana Ilic, a mother of a 9-month-old, agrees.

"We should recognize that these children are going to be the future ... leaders in this country. We should feed them when we need to be fed, right?"

Blanc is happy to see city officials take a proactive approach to public breast-feeding. Still, there's a certain level of decorum for new mothers.

"It's decency, it's just being considerate of other people," she said.

It's a matter of discretion, said Amy Little Thomas. She's no longer breast-feeding, but remembers the steps she took to avoid feeding her child in public, whether it was finding a private room or at the back table of a restaurant.

"If it's done discreetly, it's tasteful," she said.

Krupicka believes city council will amend the ordinance and craft a breast-feeding policy this month or the next.

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