

# It used to be illegal to throw snowballs in this Colorado town. Not anymore

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The forecast for the town of Severance for the first time in decades: Cloudy with a chance of snowballs.

That's because 9-year-old Dane Best — in a dress shirt and bow tie — stood before the Severance Town Board on Monday night and persuaded the officials to finally lift a ban on throwing snowballs in the small Colorado town.

“The children of Severance want the opportunity to have a snowball fight like the rest of the world,” the third-grader pleaded.

In a short presentation, Dane made the case that snowball fights promote fitness and fight obesity. He said the law was outdated and needed to be changed.

After asking several questions, the board voted unanimously to finally let snowballs fly in Severance.

In anticipation of the vote and a new world order in Severance, officials had stowed some snowballs in a freezer — much like sports teams keep champagne chilled and ready when a championship is finally clinched. Severance's long, local nightmare was over.

Dane got to throw one. A few others were tossed around outside too, in front of the television cameras capturing the historic moment. An honest-to-goodness, legal snowball fight. Dane told local media that his first target would be his younger brother, who, it should be noted, didn't even rise up in opposition to Dane's proposal.

Kyle Rietkerk, assistant to the Severance town administrator, said the boy's push for civic change came after Dane's third-grade class from Range View Elementary School took a tour of the town's government facilities in September.

For about a decade, Rietkerk said the mayor or board members would end the tour by reminding the students that it was illegal to throw snowballs in Severance but that the mayor was willing to offer up a challenge to the children to get the ban lifted.

The word “snowball” isn’t expressly noted in the ordinance, Rietkerk said. But he said the code had forbidden throwing much of anything since 1921. It’s buried deep in the town’s laws — Chapter 10, Article 5, Section 80 — sandwiched between ordinances against check fraud and abandoned containers.

“It is unlawful for any person to throw or shoot any stone or any other missile upon or at any person, animal, building, tree or other public or private property; or at or against any vehicle or equipment designed for the transportation of persons or property,” the code reads, coldly.

Rietkerk said snowballs were considered missiles and, therefore, subject to the ban. But if anyone in Severance — just east of Fort Collins — has ever been cited for throwing a snowball, Rietkerk isn’t aware of it.

Kelly Stanclift, Dane’s third-grade teacher, said she wasn’t surprised it was Dane who took it upon himself to become the agent of change.

“He’s a go-getter,” she said. “If I give him a challenge, he’s usually right on top of it.”

The town — “estimated at 5,500 friendly people,” according to the official Severance website — has been in the spotlight since Dane’s push to overturn the snowball ban was featured in an article in the Greeley Tribune.

Stanclift said Dane didn’t make it to class Tuesday, though she did tell her class of about 20 students about the meeting and showed them videos of the coverage by local television news. His teacher said he would probably be greeted as a hero upon his return — whenever that is.

“I imagine he’s a very busy young man,” she said.

Range View Elementary School Principal Kelly Johnson said the new law also had a domino effect and had forced the school to reevaluate how to deal with snowballs on campus. It’s still against the rules to throw them at other students — after all they

want to avoid a “Christmas Story”-style moment when Scut Farkus plugs an unwitting Ralphie in the face with a snowball. Johnson said they may order vinyl targets and set them up on a chain-link fence for kids to throw at.

Johnson said she was approached by a student Tuesday morning who said he didn’t know how to make a snowball. Johnson, ever the educator, said that was no problem and she’d teach him about the heft, density and sculpting of a good one.

“I’m from Michigan,” she said. “I know how to make snowballs.”

The town is also planning — likely in January — a town-wide snowball fight and will honor Dane for bringing them into line with most places in America where snowball throwing has thrived legally for years.

But while Severance can now bask in its newfound freedom, there is one problem. There’s not much snow on the ground in Severance and the National Weather Service doesn’t see any snow for the area on its long-range forecast models.

Meteorologist Jim Kalina said storms have been tracking south of Colorado and that a real chance to exercise the right to throw snowballs in Severance may have to wait a few weeks. But perhaps to avoid being a snowball target himself, Kalina offered an addendum:

“Things could change,” he said.