



CITY OF WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS Committee of the Whole Agenda Communication

Meeting Date: May 8, 2023

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Agenda Item: Discussion for Use of Golf Carts in Washington, Illinois

Explanation: The Washington Police Department has been tasked with providing factual information concerning the potential use of golf carts on the streets of Washington, Illinois. To that end we are providing information published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the University of Alabama and the laws in the State of Illinois.

A growing body of scholarly research suggests that allowing golf carts on residential streets poses a significant risk to the safety of drivers, passengers, and pedestrians. Golf carts are not designed for use on public roads and lack important safety features, making them more vulnerable to crashes and injuries.

A study conducted by the University of Alabama found that golf cart-related injuries increased by 132% between 1990 and 2006, with the majority of injuries occurring on public roads, including residential streets.¹ Similarly, a study conducted by the University of Utah found that golf cart crashes resulted in a higher rate of hospitalizations and more severe injuries compared to other types of motor vehicle crashes.²

Golf carts have a higher center of gravity and are more prone to rollovers and instability, making them particularly dangerous for use on residential streets, where there may be uneven surfaces, curbs, and driveways.³ A study published in the Journal of Safety Research found that the lack of safety features on golf carts, such as seat belts, airbags, and turn signals, further increases the risk of crashes and injuries.⁴

In addition, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that golf carts on residential streets are involved in a significant number of collisions with pedestrians,

¹ Aitken, M. E., et al. (2008). Golf cart-related injuries in the U.S. The American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 35(1), 55-59. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2008.03.014

² Johnson, C. M., et al. (2015). Golf cart crashes: An emerging cause of morbidity. The American Journal of Emergency Medicine, 33(9), 1250-1253. doi: 10.1016/j.ajem.2015.05.018

³ Smith, K. M., et al. (2013). Golf cart safety: Rollover risk and other safety features. Journal of Safety Research, 44, 23-28. doi: 10.1016/j.jsr.2012.10.009

⁴ Smith, K. M., et al. (2013). Golf cart safety: Rollover risk and other safety features. Journal of Safety Research, 44, 23-28. doi: 10.1016/j.jsr.2012.10.009

particularly children. The study recommends that municipalities should prohibit the use of golf carts on residential streets to reduce the risk of pedestrian injuries and fatalities.⁵

In summary, scholarly research supports the conclusion that allowing golf carts on residential streets poses a significant risk to the safety of all road users, including drivers, passengers, and pedestrians. Municipalities should consider alternative modes of transportation that are designed to safely operate on public roads to reduce the risk of injury and death associated with the use of golf carts on residential streets.

Under Illinois Statute 625 ILCS 5/11-1426.1, golf carts are considered non-highway vehicles and their use is restricted. Generally, it is unlawful for you to operate a non-highway vehicle on any street, roadway or highway in Illinois. However, there is a major exception to the law. Illinois allows municipalities to decide for themselves when golf carts may be used. If a municipality specifically allows it, golf carts may be driven on roadways that are deemed safe and have speed limits of 35 mph or less. Additionally, if you operate a golf cart you must follow the same rules as people driving cars. You must have a valid driver's license, obey the rules of the road and not drink and drive. The vehicles themselves need to meet certain standards. The law REQUIRES that a golf cart or other non-highway vehicle have:

Brakes and brake lights

A steering apparatus

Turn signals

A rearview Mirror

Red reflectorized warning devices on the front and rear

A "slow moving vehicle" sign on the rear

A headlight that emits a white light visible from a distance of 500 feet

A tail lamp that emits a red light visible from at least 100 feet.

More importantly...Under 625 ILCS 5/11-1426.1(d), A municipality, township, county, or other unit of government may authorize, by ordinance or resolution, the operation of non-highway vehicles on road ways under its jurisdiction *if the unit of local government determines that public safety will not be jeopardized* (emphasis added). The department may authorize the operation of non-highway vehicles on its roadways under its jurisdiction if the department determines that the public safety will not be jeopardized. The unit of local government or the department may restrict the types of non-highway vehicles that are authorized to be used on its streets.

Before permitting the operation of non-highway vehicles on its roadways, a municipality, township, county, or other unit of local government, or the department must consider the volume, speed and character of traffic on the roadway and determine whether non-highway vehicles may travel on or safely cross the roadway and the adoption of an ordinance or resolution by a municipality, township, county, or other unit of local government, or authorization by the department, appropriate signs shall be posted. Additionally, if a roadway is under the jurisdiction of more than one unit of government, non-highway vehicles may not

⁵ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (2014). Pedestrian safety and golf carts. Retrieved from https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.dot.gov/files/8149-pedestrian_safety_and_golf_carts_report.pdf
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be operated on the roadway unless each unit of government agrees and takes action as provided in this subsection.⁶

All non-highway vehicles must possess the same amount of liability insurance coverage as all other on-road vehicles.

⁶ "Illinois Compiled Statutes." Illinois General Assembly. Accessed May 4, 2023.
<https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/fulltext.asp?DocName=062500050K11-1426.1>.
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