

CART-ED AWAY

City issues first vote on shopping cart ordinance years in the making

By Caitlyn May
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Cottage Grove residents who are found with retail shopping carts outside the boundaries of the store may soon find themselves being carted away.

The city council voted on Monday to adopt an ordinance governing the theft of shopping carts around the city and while jail time is not listed as a consequence in the statute, residents could face a fine of up to \$100.

The issue has come before the board numerous times within the last five years without any action being taken. However, after councilman Ken Roberts reported collecting more than 200 shopping carts around town over the span of six months, city staff began drafting a resolution.

Chapter 8.29 of city code defines a shopping cart in violation of the statute as an "abandoned cart." Carts removed from the premises without permission of the owner are considered stolen and subject to legal action.

Several businesses around the city have complained about the theft of shopping carts, often used by what the city describes as low-income individuals to cart home groceries. However, larger chains such as Walmart have refused to comply with the city's current method of handling the carts that wind up on side streets and intersections.

"Walmart does an inventory of its carts every 30 days," Roberts said. "When they come up sort, they just order more. They don't care about their carts littered all over our community."

Councilor Jake Boone, during a previous meeting agreed and, after city staff suggested holding carts that were picked up for 30 days, ventured this, "Do we have to recycle them after 30 days or can we charge them a storage fee? So, that big businesses that keep letting us collect their carts can be paying us thousands of dollars, eventually? I'd be happy to hold them and keep sending bills to Arkansas until they come get them." Walmart is headquartered in Arkansas.

Under the new ordinance, cart owners must retrieve their property within 72 hours of being notified or face a \$50 fine per cart. Unclaimed carts will be held for 30 days before being disposed of.

Cart owners will also be responsible for funding signs at public entrances and exits notifying shoppers that unauthorized use of a cart is a crime and supplying a toll free number that members of the public can use to report abandoned carts.

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The signs, as well as the penalty for not retrieving carts was discussed at length during a council meeting

in December with councilors concerned over the added cost to store owners.

Grocery Outlet owner Ed Sowa came before the board, seeking a solution to lost and stolen carts noting that each cart cost approximately \$100 and those funds were taken directly out of his pocket. The business, Sowa said, started with 100 carts and has since lost at least 20 totaling \$2,000. Sowa cited minimum age increases and slim grocery profits when asking the council to consider any potential statute's cost to businesses.

Councilor Mike Fleck agreed, saying, "It's not the businesses' fault."

The ordinance was approved unanimously and will come before the board for a final vote later this year.

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We wish to thank the people of Cottage Grove who contributed to our 15th annual program to support the local members of our troops overseas. We were able to send 111 boxes to our troops serving in Afghanistan, Germany, Iraq, Italy and on ships in the Indian Ocean and other locations around the world.

We would especially like to thank the staff and patrons of the following business's who contributed and helped fill our barrels in their establishments:

Bi-Mart • Safeway
And especially the bowlers and staff at Cottage Bowl

We will do this again next year and are always seeking names of those serving in our Armed Forces overseas!! Please call 541-942-7099 if you know of local Military members who are serving overseas.

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