



City of Winston-Salem City Council Council Agenda Item Summary

Title	Ordinance Amending Chapter 38 of the City Code Relating to Miscellaneous Offenses and Provisions to Establish a City Parks Code of Conduct
City Council Committee	Public Safety Committee
Staff Lead (Presenter)	Ben Rowe, Assistant City Manager
Department Head	William Royston, Recreation and Parks Director
City Manager/ACM	W. Patrick Pate, City Manager

Agenda Item Summary

Recommended Council Action	Ordinance Approval
Suggested Motion Options	Move to Approve Changes to Chapter 38 of the City Code Relating to Miscellaneous Offenses and Provisions to Revise City Park Rules
Strategic Focus Area	Livable Community
Strategic Plan Objective	LC1: Enhancing Residents' Sense of Safety and Reducing Crime
Anticipated Fiscal Impact	Fiscal Impact Anticipated: See Analysis in Summary

Summary of Information

At the Public Safety Committee meeting on October 13th, City management presented proposed new rules to address disruptive behavior that has occurred in City parks in recent months. During the discussion, Council Members raised concerns about the general ordinance language, the impact of fines on individuals who cannot pay them, and the perception that the ordinances target a particular population in the community. During a subsequent presentation by Police Department staff on enforcement of City ordinances, Council Members asked about violations in City parks beyond Merschel Park. The attached report from the Police Department provides lists of the top ten park locations by the number of violations and the top ten types of violations cited in City parks. ("Security checks" are calls either initiated by an officer or resident to investigate an issue at a park.)

While the level of disruptive behavior at Merschel Park that occurred this summer may have prompted the proposed new rules and ordinance amendments, the data provided by the Police Department, as well as reports of disruptive behavior and property damage by Recreation and Parks staff, show that the challenge of disruptive behavior exists in parks throughout the city.

To respond to the disruptive behavior that was occurring in Merschel Park, City staff took the following immediate actions on September 26th to discourage the bad behavior that was taking place there.

- Remove all furniture from the park.
- Remove and store the solar table until staff can identify an alternative location.
- Disconnect free WiFi service in the park.
- Implement additional police tactics to monitor and respond to disruptive behavior.

Removal of park amenities is consistent with how the Recreation and Parks Department has addressed safety issues at other City parks. City management has not established a timeline at this point to return the furniture to the park.

Considering the feedback from October's Public Safety Committee meeting, City staff propose the implementation of a code of conduct for City parks to clearly set expectations for behavior and to ensure all members of the community can enjoy the parks and their amenities. The expectation is that all behavior should be appropriate for a family-friendly environment. The following new rules for the City's 83 parks would be established in the proposed code of conduct:

- Gambling on City property
- Smoking or vaping in designated non-smoking areas
- Act or threat of bodily harm, including subtle or implied
- Failure to follow City staff or law enforcement personnel guidance and/or direction
- Use of profanity, vulgar language, or obscene gestures
- Littering, damaging, or defacing City property
- Engaging in inappropriate physical or verbal contact and/or gang related activity
- Harassing or threatening phone calls, or forms of written or electronic communication
- Involvement with drugs, alcohol, weapons, or fireworks
- Stalking, threatening, harassing (sexual or otherwise), bullying, or any other unwanted behavior or language
- Sexual activity of any kind
- Any other violation of federal, state, and local laws, ordinances, and policies

Violations of the Code of Conduct may lead to potential criminal charges based on the violation and/or temporary or permanent suspension from City park facilities.

For the 2025 Carolina Classic Fair, the Public Assembly Facilities Commission adopted a new code of conduct to discourage disruptive behavior, which had become an increasing challenge during recent fairs. The proposed code of conduct for City parks is intended to achieve the same end—to discourage disruptive behavior and ensure all members of the community can enjoy these City amenities.

This Council Action provides for changes to the City Code, specifically Chapter 38 relating to miscellaneous offenses and provisions, to enable the Police Department

to enforce this proposed code of conduct. In addition, operating hours will be changed to run from sunrise to sunset, while providing the Recreation and Parks Department the flexibility to extend hours for specific areas of parks (e.g., tennis courts), programs, and events. The proposed Code changes also allow the department to establish different hours that a park is open to the public on a regular or temporary basis.

Recreation and Parks staff presented the proposed code of conduct to the Recreation and Parks Commission for their review and recommendation on Tuesday, November 4th. Commission Members approved a resolution recommending that the City Council amend City Code Chapter 38 to implement the new code of conduct.

If the City Council approves the proposed code changes, the new code of conduct would go into effect immediately, as soon as new signage can be fabricated and installed. With colder weather approaching in the coming months, City staff anticipate that activity in the parks will drop off. The proposed code of conduct would attempt to address problems now but also provide a “reset” for City and community expectations when next spring arrives.

Analysis of Fiscal Impact

The estimated cost to prepare new signage for the City’s 83 parks totals \$75,000. This cost includes materials and labor for the installation of 250 new signs throughout the park system. Recreation and Parks staff currently are reviewing options to reduce this cost, if possible.

Attachments

- Ordinance Amending Chapter 38 Relating to Miscellaneous Offenses and Provisions
- Exhibit – Winston-Salem Police Department Calls for Service and Call Types at City Parks

- Draft Code of Conduct Sign

Committee Action	COTW 11/12/2025
For:	Against:
Remarks: Approved Unanimously	