



DATE: May 5, 2025

MEMO TO: Sara Knizhnik, Chair
Operations Committee

FROM: John E. Nelson
Chief Operations Officer

REQUEST: Provide policy direction regarding smoking (including vaping) on District property.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION SUPPORTED: Public Access and Connections

FINANCIAL DATA: There is no financial impact at this time. If the General Use Ordinance were amended to prohibit smoking at additional locations on District property, then there would be a cost to fabricate and install new signs accordingly.

BACKGROUND: At the February 3, 2025, Operations Committee meeting, a Commissioner discussed during Miscellaneous Business a concern about smoking in the preserves. The Committee discussed the issue briefly and the Committee Chair and District President directed staff to bring the topic to the Operations Committee for policy direction.

The Smoke-Free Illinois Act (SFIA) is a state law that was enacted on January 1, 2008. The SFIA bans smoking indoors in public places and places of employment, and outdoors within fifteen (15) feet of any entrance, exit, window that opens, or ventilation intake of a public place or place of employment. Prior to that state law, there were no prohibitions on smoking on District property.

In September 2013, the District adopted an amendment to the Ordinance Governing the General Use of District Property (“General Use Ordinance”) that prohibited smoking on District property in areas near playgrounds. Specifically, the General Use Ordinance provides that a person may not:

V.D.(xix) – *“ignite, smoke or deposit any cigarette, cigar, pipe or other tobacco product or smoking device or material within, or within fifteen (15) feet of, any District playground.”*

In January 2020, the District adopted an updated General Use Ordinance that superseded previous revisions and prohibited:

V.D.(xx) – *“Smoking, vaping, or using any smoking devices to use tobacco, cannabis, illegal substances, or vaping liquids within 20 feet of any portion of any District Building or open air dining facility, on or near any District playground, or within any area that is being used for a special event or program sponsored wholly or in part by the District.”*

In August 2021, the District adopted another amendment to the General Use Ordinance that also banned smoking within any dog exercise area, such that the current rule prohibits:

V.D.(xx) – “Smoking, vaping, or using any smoking devices to use tobacco, cannabis, illegal substances, or vaping liquids within 20 feet of any portion of any District Building or open air dining facility, on or near any District playground, within any dog exercise area, or within any area that is being used for a special event or program sponsored wholly or in part by the District.”

Therefore, the current General Use Ordinance currently prohibits smoking:

- Within 20 feet of any District Building or open-air dining facility
- On or near any District playground
- Within any off-leash dog area
- Within any area that is being used for a special event or program sponsored wholly or in part by the District.

The General Use Ordinance does not prohibit smoking on any District property (including trails), except as identified above. The penalty for violating the no-smoking section of the General Use Ordinance is a fine of \$120.00.

Since the most recent rule was put in place in 2021, the Public Safety Department does not have any records of issuing any written warnings or citations for violating the smoking prohibitions in the General Use Ordinance.

Grounds Maintenance staff reports that occasionally it will pick up smoking litter in preserves, with the most frequent observations of smoking litter being made in the preserve parking lots.

The Natural Resources Department tracks and reports on wildfire incidents on District property. There is one fire incident known to have been started by inappropriately handled or discarded smoking materials, that being a fire at Hastings Lake where a dead/dying tree caught on fire from a cigar or cigarette butt inappropriately disposed of in a hollow of the tree.

If the Committee would like to move forward with prohibiting smoking elsewhere on District property, the process would be to direct staff to bring an amendment to Section V.D.(xx) of the General Use Ordinance to a future Committee meeting for review and, if recommended for approval, to the Board for final review.

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Executive Director, Deputy Director of Finance, Director of Public Safety, Manager of Board Operations and Corporate Counsel.