

ITEM #: 37  
DATE: 04-08-25  
DEPT: POLICE

**COUNCIL ACTION FORM**

**SUBJECT: IMMEDIATE TOWING OF ILLEGALLY PARKED VEHICLES ON AUGUST 23, 2025**

**BACKGROUND:**

**On July 12, 2022, the City Council approved an ordinance to allow for the immediate towing of vehicles parked illegally when authorized by City Council resolution.** The resolution that authorizes such towing must designate certain types of illegal parking subject to tow, along with the specific dates, times, and geographic area subject to immediate towing.

**This request is to approve a resolution authorizing the use of the immediate towing ordinance for certain areas and times on Saturday, August 23, 2024. This date is the Saturday before Iowa State University classes begin.**

In the past several years, the Saturday before ISU classes has been associated with an increase in alcohol consumption, illegal parking, nuisance parties, and other high-risk activities. This phenomenon began many years ago when alcohol was prohibited in fraternities and sororities during the week leading up to the start of classes. The prohibition ended at 8:00 A.M. on the Saturday before classes began. At 8:01 A.M. (801 day) some students chose to begin drinking.

In the late 2010s, these behaviors on the Saturday before classes began to grow beyond a small segment of the ISU population. The date has increasingly become a destination for people from outside Ames and is no longer limited to ISU students. Complaints from residents in the area have also grown. **There is an additional concern this year: the first Iowa State Football game is being held in Dublin, Ireland on this day. Staff anticipates the coincidence of the game and the Saturday before classes could result in increased incidences of nuisance parties, since most students will not be traveling to Ireland for the game. Additionally, many ISU officials will be out of town attending the game, decreasing the ISU presence in the community on this weekend.**

In 2021, City leadership, ISU leadership, and both the Ames and ISU Police Departments began to discuss ways to refocus the event in a way to reduce harm, reduce noise complaints, reduce parking complaints, etc. The unofficial event of 801- day is being transitioned to an official ISU event, Cyclone Welcome Weekend. The University has created several activities to take the focus off alcohol use and overuse and steer activities towards community events and safer alternatives. At this time, it is unclear how the event may differ with the addition of the football game in Ireland.

**An additional strategy resulting from these discussions is a focus on immediately removing vehicles that have been illegally parked on residential streets and have become a safety hazard.** Illegal parking on residential streets has increased to the point that in some cases emergency vehicles are unable to travel down the street safely due to cars parked on both sides.

The current penalty for this kind of illegal parking is \$10-\$15. This amount has not been a sufficient deterrent to the illegal parking that creates a safety hazard. In addition, a parking ticket does not relieve the safety issue until the violator decides to move the vehicle; except in rare instances, the Police

Department is not authorized to order an illegally parked vehicle to be towed immediately. The strategy of towing illegally parked vehicles was authorized in both 2022, 2023 and 2024 for Cyclone Welcome Weekend. Staff was pleased to see fewer illegally parked vehicles each of these years with only about 30 vehicles towed each year.

**Based on these issues, and the success of last two years, staff requests Council approval to invoke the immediate towing ordinance on Saturday, August 23 from midnight to 11:59 p.m. in the following geographic area: Lincoln Way between Beach Avenue and State Avenue State Avenue between Lincoln Way and Mortensen Avenue Mortensen Avenue between State Avenue and Beach Avenue Beach Avenue between Mortensen Avenue and Lincoln Way. (See Attached Map)**

**Staff requests authorization to tow illegally parked vehicles for the following violations:**

- 1. Alternate side parking violations**
- 2. No parking on one side of the street violations**
- 3. Yellow line violations**
- 4. Fire hydrant violations**

**Staff does not intend to tow for overtime parking violations, absent a public safety risk.**

**The ordinance makes clear that the passage of such a resolution does not prevent the immediate towing of vehicles when they would otherwise normally be subject to immediate towing, such as blocking traffic or access, or presenting a public safety risk.**

Cyclone Welcome Weekend is several months away which provides ample time to notify the community of the special towing authorization. This will aid residents and visitors in planning to find safe, legal parking if they intend to visit the designated area on that date. Staff will take the following steps to notify the public about the towing authorization in the fall:

- The Police Department and ISU staff will inform residents while going door-to-door during the Good Neighbor Campaign in early August to the extent staffing levels allow.
- An email outlining the changes to the ordinance will be sent to property managers and owners, with a request to forward the message to tenants. A similar email will be sent to neighborhood associations.
- Both the City and University will publicize the changes in press releases and social media accounts.
- Electronic message signs will also be placed in the area in advance of August 23, subject to availability.

In addition, a request will be made to the University to send out notifications to students and staff to make them aware of the new towing policy as a part of a larger campaign regarding Cyclone Welcome Weekend as they have done in the past.

**In the past three years, staff has placed signs throughout the affected areas warning of the towing policy, although the placement of warning signage is not required by the Municipal Code. This process requires a significant investment of staff time (approximately 18 staff-hours to install the signs and the same amount of time to remove them). Staff will attempt to install the signs again this year, but may not be able to commit to the same level of sign coverage as seen in previous**

**years due to staff vacancies that currently exist and are anticipated to continue through August.**

**ALTERNATIVES:**

1. Authorize the immediate towing of vehicles on Saturday, August 24, 2024, from midnight to 11:59 p.m. in the designated area of:

Lincoln Way between Beach Avenue and State Avenue  
State Avenue between Lincoln Way and Mortensen Avenue  
Mortensen Avenue between State Avenue and Beach Avenue  
Beach Avenue between Mortensen Avenue and Lincoln Way

For the following illegal parking violations:

- a. Alternate side parking violations
  - b. No parking on one side of the street violations
  - c. Yellow line violations
  - d. Fire Hydrant violations
2. Authorize immediate towing as described in Alternative 1, but modify the time, area, or types of violations subject to immediate towing.
3. Do not authorize the towing of illegally parked vehicles.

**CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

**The increase of illegal parking puts the public at risk by making it difficult for emergency vehicles to respond to medical calls, fire calls, and law enforcement calls for service. The City and University have worked very hard over the past few years to create an event to welcome students to Ames (Cyclone Welcome Weekend) and to deter others from attending who create this hazard.** The proposed times and geographic area subject to immediate towing will be publicized to the community through a variety of methods in advance of August 23. In addition, this strategy led to fewer illegally parked vehicles in 2022, 2023, and 2024 with few cars needing to be towed. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative No. 1 as described above.

**ATTACHMENT(S):**

[Immediate\\_Towing\\_proposed\\_area\\_2025.jpg](#)