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City to regulate abandoned shopping carts and curb blight

An ordinance designed to help curb the problem of abandoned shopping carts strewn throughout the city was passed by the Federal Way City Council during the Dec. 4 meeting.

For many years, the City has provided a retrieval service of abandoned shopping carts for free. The work was afforded through a volunteer program comprised of retired police officers and city-owned equipment. However, the age of the volunteers coupled with the amount of work has far exceeded the ability of the City to continue the program.

Unfortunately, shopping carts are being left abandoned across the city at increased numbers, which has become an issue of blight and public safety. The proposed ordinance establishes incentives for retailers to prevent shopping carts from leaving their property, and it imposes fines when shopping carts are retrieved by the City and left unclaimed.

“We will no longer tolerate the blight of shopping carts littering our streets,” Mayor Jim Ferrell said. “We have an obligation to keep our streets clean. We will be working with our retailers and our residents to help accomplish that goal.”

The proposed ordinance was drafted after input from area retailers over two meetings and based on research of neighboring city ordinances related to abandoned shopping carts.

The steps of the proposed ordinance are as follows:

- The City of Federal Way will pick up abandoned shopping carts along rights-of-way, City-owned properties, and, when given permission, private properties.
- Carts are then taken to a recovery location
- The City then contacts the retailers of the abandoned carts and informs them that the City will hold the carts for 14 days.
- Retailers may pick up their abandoned carts, but will be charged a fee of \$25 per cart.
- If carts are not retrieved by the retailer, the City takes them to a salvage yard where for disposal an additional \$25 fee will be imposed.

In its first year of removing shopping carts, 2010, Federal Way Police Department volunteers removed more than 1,200 carts. This year, they are on track to remove about 2,000.

Shopping carts can cost between \$75 to \$400, and it is estimated that the volunteer-based program has saved retailers about \$2.25 million over the course of eight years, according to Brian Davis, Community Development director.

“Area retailers know that this problem is a public nuisance and presents various potential safety and health hazards here in Federal Way,” Davis said. “We’re grateful that they have been receptive and willing to come to the table to talk about solutions during the course of us generating this proposed ordinance.”

The ordinance will take effect on Jan. 7.

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