

CHAPTER 3 – ABANDONED, NUISANCE AND JUNKED MOTOR VEHICLES

Sec. 8-3001. - Administration.

The police department, fire department, and code enforcement officer of the Town shall be responsible for the administration and enforcement of this article. The police department shall be responsible for administering the removal and disposition of vehicles determined to be "abandoned" on the public streets and highways within the Town and on property owned by the Town. The Town Council, with the assistance of the code enforcement officer, Town planner, or fire department, shall be responsible for administering the removal and disposition of "abandoned," "nuisance" or "junked motor vehicles" located on private property. The Town may, on an annual basis, contract with private tow truck operators or towing businesses to remove, store, and dispose of abandoned vehicles, nuisance vehicles and junked motor vehicles in compliance with this article and applicable state laws. Nothing in this article shall be construed to limit the legal authority or powers of the Town police department and fire department in enforcing other laws or in otherwise carrying out their duties.

Sec. 8-3002. - Definitions.

For the purpose of this article, certain words and terms are defined as herein indicated:

Abandoned vehicle: As authorized and defined in G.S. §160A-303, an abandoned motor vehicle is one (1) that:

- (1) Is left upon a public street or highway in violation of a law or ordinance prohibiting parking; or
- (2) Is left on a public street or highway for longer than seven (7) days; or
- (3) Is left on property owned or operated by the Town for longer than twenty-four (24) hours; or
- (4) Is left on private property without the consent of the owner, occupant or lessee thereof, for longer than two (2) hours.

Authorizing official: The supervisory employee of the police department or the code enforcement officer, respectively, designated to authorize the removal of vehicles under the provisions of this article.

Motor vehicle or vehicle: All machines designed or intended to travel over land or water by self-propulsion or while attached to any self-propelled vehicle.

Junked motor vehicle: As authorized and defined in G.S. §160A-303.2 the term, junked motor vehicle means a vehicle that does not display a current license plate lawfully upon that vehicle and that:

- (1) Is partially dismantled or wrecked; or
- (2) Cannot be self-propelled or moved in the manner in which it originally was intended to move; or
- (3) Is more than five (5) years old and appears to be worth less than five hundred dollars (\$500.00).

Nuisance vehicle. A vehicle on public or private property that is determined and declared to be a health or safety hazard, or a public nuisance, or unlawful, including a vehicle found to be:

- (1) A breeding ground or harbor for mosquitoes, other insects, rats or other pests; or

- (2) A point of heavy growth of weeds or other noxious vegetation over eight (8) inches in height; or
- (3) A point of collection of pools or ponds of water; or
- (4) A point of concentration of quantities of gasoline, oil or other flammable or explosive materials as evidenced by odor, visible presence; or
- (5) One which has areas of confinement which cannot be operated from the inside, such as trunks, hoods, passenger interior, or other interior sections, etc.; or
- (6) So situated or located that there is a danger of its falling or turning over; or
- (7) One (1) which is a point of collection of garbage, food waste, animal waste, or any other rotten or putrescible matter of any kind; or
- (8) One which has sharp parts thereof which are jagged or contain sharp edges of metal or glass; or
- (9) So offensive to the sight as to damage the community, neighborhood or area appearance; or
- (10) Used by children in play activities; or
- (11) Any other vehicle specifically declared a health and safety hazard and a public nuisance by the Town Council.

Sec. 8-3003. - Abandoned vehicle unlawful; removal authorized.

- (a) It shall be unlawful for the registered owner or person entitled to possession of a vehicle to cause or allow such vehicle to be abandoned as the term is defined herein.
- (b) Upon investigation, proper authorizing officials of the Town or code enforcement officer may determine that a vehicle is an abandoned vehicle and order the vehicle removed.

Sec. 8-3004. - Nuisance vehicle unlawful; removal authorized.

- (a) It shall be unlawful for the registered owner or person entitled to possession of a motor vehicle, or for the owner, lessee, or occupant of the real property upon which the vehicle is located to leave or allow the vehicle to remain on the property after it has been declared a nuisance vehicle.
- (b) Upon investigation, the code enforcement officer may determine and declare that a vehicle is a health or safety hazard and a nuisance vehicle as defined above, and order the vehicle removed.

Sec. 8-3005. - Junked motor vehicle regulated; removal authorized.

- (a) It shall be unlawful for the registered owner or person entitled to the possession of a junked motor vehicle, or for the owner, lessee, or occupant of the real property upon which a junked motor vehicle is located to leave or allow the vehicle to remain on the property after the vehicle has been ordered removed.
- (b) Subject to the provisions of subsection (c), upon investigation, the code enforcement officer may order the removal of a junked motor vehicle as defined in this article after finding in writing that the aesthetic benefits of removing the vehicle outweigh the burdens imposed on the private property owner. Such finding shall be based on a balancing of the monetary loss of the apparent owner against the corresponding gain to the public by

promoting or enhancing community, neighborhood or area appearance. The following among other relevant factors may be considered:

- (1) Protection of property values;
 - (2) Promotion of tourism and other economic development opportunities;
 - (3) Indirect protection of public health and safety;
 - (4) Preservation of the character and integrity of the community, and
 - (5) Promotion of the comfort, happiness and emotional stability of area residents.
- (c) Permitted concealment or enclosure of junked motor vehicle: Any other junked motor vehicle(s) must be kept in a garage or building structure that provides a complete enclosure so that the junked motor vehicle(s) cannot be seen from a public street or abutting property. A garage or building structure means one which is erected pursuant to the lawful issuance of a zoning permit and a building permit which has been constructed in accordance with all zoning and building code regulations.

Sec. 8-3006. - Declared to be a health or safety hazard.

Any partially dismantled or wrecked vehicle, vehicle which is incapable of self-propulsion or being moved in the manner for which it was originally intended, vehicle left on private property without the consent of the owner, occupant or lessee thereof, or any junk motor vehicle is declared to be an attractive nuisance for children, a breeding place for rats and vermin, and a potential fire hazard. All vehicles abandoned upon privately owned property, which have been abandoned for as long as 30 days are declared to constitute a health and safety hazard.

Sec. 8-3007. - Removal of abandoned, nuisance or junked motor vehicles; pre-towing notice requirements.

Except as set forth in section 8-3008 below, an abandoned, nuisance or junked vehicle which is to be removed shall be towed only after notice to the registered owner or person entitled to possession of the vehicle. In the case of a nuisance vehicle or a junked motor vehicle, if the names and mailing addresses of the registered owner, or person entitled to the possession of the vehicle, or the owner, lessee, or occupant of the real property upon which the vehicle is located can be ascertained in the exercise of reasonable diligence, notice shall be given by first class mail (or any other method authorized for service by North Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure). The person who mails the notice(s) shall retain a written record to show the name(s) and address (es) to whom the notice is mailed, and the date mailed. If such names and addresses cannot be ascertained or if the vehicle to be removed is an abandoned motor vehicle, notice shall be given by affixing on the windshield or some other conspicuous place on the vehicle. The notice shall state that the vehicle will be removed by the Town on a specified date, no sooner than seven (7) days after the notice is affixed or mailed, unless the vehicle is moved by the owner or legal possessor prior to that time.

An order to remove abandoned vehicles on private property, nuisance vehicles and junked motor vehicles to which notice is required to be given, may be appealed by the registered owner or person entitled to possession, does not remove the vehicle, but chooses to appeal, within the time period stated in the notice by appearing before the BOA. Such appeal shall stay the order of removal until final determination by the BOA. The appeal shall consider the determination that the vehicle is abandoned, or in the case of a nuisance vehicle, or in the case of a junked motor vehicle, that the aesthetic benefits of removing the vehicle outweigh the burdens. In the event no appeal

is taken within the time period stated in the notice to remove, the code enforcement officer may proceed to remove the vehicle.

Sec. 8-3008. - Exceptions to prior requirement.

The requirement that notice be given prior to the removal of an abandoned, nuisance or junked motor vehicle may, as determined by the authorizing official or code enforcement officer, be omitted in those circumstances where there is a special need for prompt action to eliminate traffic obstructions or to otherwise maintain and protect the public safety and welfare. Such findings shall, in all cases, be entered by the authorizing official in the appropriate daily records. Circumstances justifying the removal of vehicles without prior notice include:

- (1) *Vehicles abandoned on the streets within the Town.* For vehicles left on the public streets or highways, the Town Council hereby determines that immediate removal of such vehicles therefrom for safekeeping by or under the direction of the police department, the department of planning and community development, or the department of public works, to a storage garage or area may be warranted when they are:
 - a. Obstructing traffic;
 - b. Parked in violation of an ordinance prohibiting or restricting parking;
 - c. Parked in a no-stopping or standing zone;
 - d. Parked in loading zones;
 - e. Parked in bus zones, or;
 - f. Parked in violation of temporary parking restrictions imposed under Code sections.
- (2) *Other abandoned or nuisance vehicles.* With respect to abandoned or nuisance vehicles left on Town-owned property, other than the streets and highways, and on private property, such vehicles may be removed without giving prior notice; only in those circumstances where the authorizing official or code enforcement officer finds a special need for prompt action to protect and maintain the public health, safety and welfare. Therefrom for safekeeping by or under the direction of the police department, the department of planning and community development, or the department of public works, to a storage garage or area. By way of illustration and not of limitation, such circumstances include vehicles blocking or obstructing ingress or egress to businesses and residences, vehicles parked in such a location or manner as to pose a traffic hazard, and vehicles causing damage to public or private property.

Sec. 8-3009. - Removal from private property.

- (a) Before any vehicle may be removed by the Town from private property as defined above to be abandon, junk or nuisance, the owner of the real property on which any such vehicle is located must be given at least five days' written notice from the Town of the vehicle removal. The owner may request in writing that the code enforcement officer review the determination that the vehicle to be removed is in violation of the ordinance. No such vehicle shall be removed from privately owned premises without the written request of the owner, lessee or occupant of the premises on which the vehicle is located unless the vehicle has had the status of an abandoned vehicle on such privately owned premises for as long as 30 days and has, therefore, become a health and safety hazard in accordance with the declaration of the Town Council as set out in section 8-3003. When a vehicle is removed from privately owned property at the request of a person, the person at whose request such vehicle is moved shall indemnify the Town against loss or expense incurred by reason of removal, storage or sale thereof.

Sec. 8-3010. - Removal of vehicles; post-towing requirements.

Any abandoned, nuisance or junked motor vehicle which has been ordered removed may, as directed by the Town, be removed to a storage garage or area by the tow truck operator or towing business contracting to perform such services for the Town. Whenever such a vehicle is removed, the authorizing official shall immediately notify the last known registered owner of the vehicle, such notice to include the following:

- (1) The description of the removed vehicle;
- (2) The location where the vehicle is stored;
- (3) The violation with which the owner is charged, if any;
- (4) The procedure the owner must follow to redeem the vehicle; and
- (5) The procedure the owner must follow to request a probable cause hearing on the removal.

The Town shall attempt to give notice to the vehicle owner by telephone; however, whether or not the owner is reached by telephone, written notice, including the information set forth in subsections (1) through (5) above, shall also be mailed to the registered owner's last known address, unless this notice is waived in writing by the vehicle owner or agent.

If the vehicle is registered in North Carolina, notice shall be given to the registered owner within twenty-four (24) hours after vehicles is removed. If the vehicle is not registered in the state, notice shall be given to the registered owner within seventy-two (72) hours from the removal of the vehicle.

Whenever an abandoned, nuisance or junked motor vehicle is removed, and such vehicle has no valid registration or registration plates, the authorizing official shall make reasonable efforts, including checking the vehicle identification number, to determine the last known registered owner of the vehicle and to notify him of the information set forth in subsections (1) through (5) above.

Sec. 8-3011. - Right to probable cause hearing before sale or final disposition of vehicle.

After the removal of an abandoned vehicle, nuisance vehicle or junked motor vehicle, the owner or any other person entitled to possession is entitled to a hearing for the purpose of determining if probable cause exists for removing the vehicle. A request for hearing must be filed in writing with the county magistrate designated in G.S. §20-219.11(c) to receive such hearing requests, the magistrate will set the hearing within seventy-two (72) hours of receipt of the request, and the hearing will be conducted in accordance with the provisions of G.S. §20-219.11 as amended.

Sec. 8-3012. - Redemption of vehicle during proceedings.

At any stage in the proceedings, including before the probable cause hearing, the owner may obtain possession of the removed vehicle by paying the towing fee, including any storage charges, or by posting a bond for double the amount of such fees and charges to the tow truck operator or towing business having custody of the removed vehicle. Upon regaining possession of a vehicle, the owner or person entitled to possession of the vehicle shall not allow or engage in further violations of this article.

Sec. 8-3013. - Sale and disposition of unclaimed vehicle.

Any abandoned, nuisance or junked motor vehicle which is not claimed by the owner or other party entitled to possession, will be disposed of by the tow truck operator or towing business

having custody of the vehicle. Disposition of such a vehicle shall be carried out in coordination with the Town and in accordance with Article 1 of Chapter 44A of the North Carolina General Statutes, except no probable cause hearing in addition to the hearing provided for in Section 8-3011 is required.

State Law reference— Disposal of abandoned, nuisance or junked motor vehicle, by tow truck operator or towing business, G.S. § Art.1, Ch. 44A.

Sec. 8-3014. - General penalty.

(a) Except as set forth in subsection (b), violation of any provision of this Code or any other Town ordinance shall be a misdemeanor as provided by G.S. § 14-4(a).

(b) Violation of any provision of this Code shall subject the offender to a civil penalty in the amount of fifty dollars (\$50.00), to be recovered by the Town in a civil action in the nature of debt if the offender does not pay the penalty within a period of seventy-two (72) hours after he has been cited for violation of the ordinance. Citation shall be in writing, signed by the code enforcement officer and shall be delivered or mailed to the offender either at the residence or at the place of business or at the place where the violation occurred. Each day's continuing violation shall be a separate and distinct offense. Any action to recover such civil penalty may be joined in action for appropriate equitable or other legal remedy, including injunctions and orders of abatement and including an action to recover damages owing to the Town by reason of expenses incurred by the Town in abating, correcting, limiting and otherwise dealing with the harmful effects of the offending action.

Sec. 8-3015. - Exceptions.

Nothing in this article shall apply to any vehicle:

- (1) Regulated under G.S. § 160A-303.2 which is kept or stored at a bona fide "automobile graveyard" or "junkyard" as defined in G.S. § 136-143, in accordance with the "Junkyard Control Act," G.S. § 136-141, et seq., or the removing or disposing of any motor vehicle that is used on a regular basis for business or personal use; and
- (2) Regulated under G.S. § 160A-303 which is in an enclosed building or any vehicle on the premises of a business enterprise being operated in a lawful place and manner if the vehicle is necessary to the operation of the enterprise, or to any vehicle in an appropriate storage place or depository maintained in a lawful place and manner by the Town.

Sec. 8-3016. - Unlawful removal of impounded vehicle.

It shall be unlawful for any person to remove or attempt to remove from any storage facility, designated by the Town, any vehicle which has been impounded pursuant to the provisions of this Code, unless and until all towing and impoundment fees which are due, or bond in lieu of such fees, have been paid.

State Law reference— Definition of junkyard, G.S. § 136-143, Junkyard Control Act, G.S. Junkyard Control Act, G.S. 136 136-141

Sec. 8-3017. - Protection against criminal or civil liability.

No person shall be held to answer in any civil or criminal action to any owner or other person legally entitled to the possession of an abandoned, nuisance or junked motor vehicle, for disposing of such vehicle as provided in this article.