



To: Mayor and Board of Commissioners  
From: Percy T. Crutchfield, Chief of Police  
CC: Bryan Gruesbeck, Town Manager  
Alice Lloyd, Town Clerk  
Paul Messick, Town Attorney  
Ref: Golf Cart Ordinance Report

Date: August 21, 2015

**Background:** During the May 11, 2015 board meeting the town was asked to consider implementing an ordinance that would allow golf carts to be operated on the Town Streets. This request was submitted by Casey Mann pursuant to a provision in the North Carolina General Statutes that allows towns to permit golf carts to be operated on municipal streets. The town was also provided with a sample/draft ordinance for consideration by Ms. Mann. The Board requested that I and the Manager consider this matter and bring it back to the board sometime in August.

**Update:** This item has actually caused more public response than I expected. I have received several inquiries about the subject. Over the past several years the use of golf carts and other electric low speed vehicles have increased throughout the country. Some of the advantages are they are easy to use, they provide an inexpensive alternative to regular motor vehicles and they are environmentally friendly. One of the disadvantages is that they are not as crashworthy as other vehicles that meet federal safety standards and the risk of serious injury increases if they are involved in an accident.

First, I think it's important to understand what is already legal under the North Carolina General Statutes. Below is the North Carolina statute that applies to registered low speed vehicles.

**§ 20-121.1. Operation of a low-speed vehicle on certain roadways.**

The operation of a low-speed vehicle is authorized with the following restrictions:

- (1) A low-speed vehicle may be operated only on streets and highways where the posted speed limit is 35 miles per hour or less. This does not prohibit a low-speed vehicle from crossing a road or street at an intersection where the road or street being crossed has a posted speed limit of more than 35 miles per hour.
- (2) A low-speed vehicle shall be equipped with headlamps, stop lamps, turn signal lamps, tail lamps, reflex reflectors, parking brakes, rearview mirrors, windshields, windshield wipers, speedometer, seat belts, and a vehicle identification number.
- (3) A low-speed vehicle shall be registered and insured in accordance with G.S. 20-50 and G.S. 20-309.
- (4) The Department of Transportation may prohibit the operation of low-speed vehicles on any road or highway if it determines that the prohibition is necessary in the interest of safety.

- (5) Low-speed vehicles must comply with the safety standards in 49 C.F.R. § 571.500. (2001-356, s. 5.)

Based on my research and interpretation of the law this means that any golf cart that has been equipped and registered under these guidelines could presently be operated on the streets of Pittsboro.

What can the Town of Pittsboro do? According to the North Carolina General Statutes:

**§ 160A-300.6. Regulation of golf carts on streets, roads, and highways.**

(a) Notwithstanding the provisions of G.S. 20-50 and G.S. 20-54, **a city may**, by ordinance, regulate the operation of golf carts, as defined in G.S. 20-4.01(12a), on any public street, road, or highway where the speed limit is 35 miles per hour or less within its municipal limits or on any property owned or leased by the city.

(b) By ordinance, a city may require the registration of golf carts, charge a fee for the registration, specify who is authorized to operate golf carts, and specify the required equipment, load limits, and the hours and methods of operation of golf carts. No person less than 16 years of age may operate a golf cart on a public street, road, or highway. (2009-459, s. 3.)

This is the basis for many towns and cities allowing golf carts operations on their streets and what has been requested of the town by Ms. Mann. It should be noted that in my opinion this would only apply to town streets and not any highways or streets that are owned or maintained by the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

Based on my research the town basically has two options. **First**, we can chose to require persons to operate golf carts under the guidelines set forth by the state statutes and have the golf carts registered as low speed vehicles. This would require no action on our part since it is already allowed by state statute and is in effect taking no further action on this matter. The **second** option is to pass an ordinance pursuant to the above listed statute (§ 160A-300.6.) allowing the operation of Golf Carts on town streets. If that option is considered we need to determine what requirements we want to set forth such as required safety equipment, hours of operation, driver's license requirements, renewal & registration periods, etc.

The Model Ordinance that was provided by Ms. Mann was well written and appears to have been carefully researched. The model ordinance is very consistent with other towns in North Carolina that allow golf carts to be operated on their streets that I have read. I have attached a copy for your review and recommendations. One other matter that the board may wish to consider is whether or not to require the vehicles be equipped with an occupant restraint system. This does not appear to be a common requirement on other town's ordinances but still should at least be considered in my opinion.

**Action requested:** For the Board of Commissioners to receive the information and determine the need for and ordinance and its restrictions approving the use of golf carts on town streets.