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Success of Adjudication Program Could Mean Future Expansion

In less than a year since traffic court returned to Village Hall within an administrative adjudication process, nearly 7,000 cases have been heard and only two challenged with an appeal to a higher court. Now, as the adjudication process nears its first anniversary, officials are studying adding police tickets, health violations and animal infractions to the slate of cases heard next year.

“The central most important thing about adjudication is that it is fair,” said Adjudication Manager Wayne Moran, who helped Evanston set up its adjudication program before coming to Oak Park. “Individuals who have been cited for violations have a very clear-cut set of appeal guidelines given to them along with the citation, so there can be no confusion about their rights or the process.”

Moran said rulings are made by administrative law judges who have specific credentials spelled out in state law. “They rule strictly on the facts of the case,” he said, a likely key factor in why there have been so few appeals to a higher court.

Prior to the implementation of the adjudication program, individuals wishing to contest an Oak Park parking ticket had to go before a Cook County Circuit Court judge. Through the adjudication process, residents can present testimony and evidence in Village Hall, without the inconvenience or expense of having to drive to the courthouse in Maywood. Cases are heard at 9:30 and 10:30 a.m., and at 1 and 2:30 p.m., every Tuesday in Village Hall Council Chambers, 123 Madison St.

Plans also are in the works to test an online appeal process through the Village’s website, eliminating the need to even appear before an administrative law judge. If the appeal is denied, individuals would then be able to pay online. Approximately 150,000 parking tickets are written each year in Oak Park.

The Adjudication Program is part of the Village’s long-range strategy to improve regulation and management of the community’s scarce parking supply. Control over parking services recently was brought back in house after several years of private management, and parking enforcement efforts stepped-up with programs such as immobilizing – or *booting* – the vehicles of scofflaws who have five or more unpaid judgments.

Since the Village began booting cars in July 52 boot hearings have been conducted within the framework of the Adjudication Program. The Village will soon begin seeking suspension of the driver's license of individuals who have 10 or more unpaid judgments.

The Office of Adjudication isn't just about enforcement, however. Staff recently became involved in drivers' education classes at Oak Park-River Forest High School, offering information on how to get a parking permit, parking rules and regulations, and what to do if they receive a parking ticket.

"We're working to create a foundation for future legal encounters we may have with students who may one day find themselves with a parking ticket or other traffic violation," Moran said. "Parking rules and regulations that experienced drivers take for granted may be a little confusing to new drivers. By working with the school, perhaps we can help students gain even broader knowledge and understanding of the responsibilities that are part of driving."

The Village annually collects about \$2 million in parking violation fines and fees, a level that is expected to climb as the Adjudication Program continues to make it easier for individuals to seek review of their tickets and pay any judgments. While the income from parking tickets is an important source of revenue, parking rules and regulations are more about public safety and managing a scarce parking supply than generating revenue, according to Moran.

For more information on the Village's Adjudication Program, call 708.358.5479 or email adjudication@oak-park.us.

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