

CITY OF TOWN AND COUNTRY **MUNICIPAL COURT**

COURT PROCEDURE AND YOUR RIGHTS

PRIOR TO COURT

Please check in with the clerk at the front door so your file will be pulled. After you have checked in please take a seat in the courtroom. Turn off all cell phone and any other devices you may have which might make noise while court is in session. If a cell phone interrupts Court proceedings it will be confiscated. During court there is no talking except to conduct court business. Proper court attire is required in Municipal Court. If the bailiffs determine that your attire is not appropriate you will be asked to leave the Court and change into appropriate attire. This will not relieve you of your responsibility to appear in Court.

Your presence in Municipal Court today is perhaps your first experience in any court. This information has been prepared to help you understand the court proceedings and to inform you of your rights and duties. Every person should leave this court with the feeling that he or she has had a fair and impartial trial or hearing.

The Town and Country Municipal Court is a division of the Circuit Court of St. Louis County. It is a part of the judicial branch of Town and Country's government and is part of the state judicial system. The court is operated under the Revised Statutes of Missouri and Rules established by the Supreme Court and Circuit Court of St. Louis County. You are appearing in court because you have been charged with an ordinance violation by the City of Town and Country. This does not mean you are guilty of any offense.

OPENING OF COURT

As the Judge enters the courtroom, please rise. Afterwards, please remove your hat and be seated. There is no talking, eating, or drinking during Court. When your name is called, please form a line behind the dais. Your name will be called a second time by the Judge. You should then step up to the bench before the Judge. The charges will be read to you one at a time.

Your decision on what plea to enter is the most important decision you will have to make. Be sure to read this completely before entering your plea. If you decide that you would like to seek the services of an attorney, please inform the Judge and you will be given time to do so.

YOU HAVE THE FOLLOWING RIGHTS IN THIS COURT:

1. You have the right to be informed of the charge against you and range of punishment for the charge;
2. You have the right to be represented by an attorney. **An attorney may be appointed for you if:**
 - you are indigent (unable to afford an attorney); **AND**
 - it appears to the Judge that there would possibly be a jail sentence upon conviction;
3. You have a right to have a trial, including a trial by jury;
4. At trial you have the right to question any witness who may testify against you;
5. You have the right to subpoena persons to testify on your behalf at your trial;
6. You have the right to testify at your trial but neither the City nor anyone else can force you to testify;
7. If you had a trial and were found guilty you have a right to a trial de novo (a new trial) in the Circuit Court of St. Louis County.

IF YOU PLEAD GUILTY YOU GIVE UP ALL THE RIGHTS LISTED ABOVE.

You must first enter a plea. You may plead **NOT GUILTY**, **GUILTY**, or **GUILTY WITH AN EXPLANATION**.

If you enter a plea of **NOT GUILTY**, your case will be set for TRIAL. Your case will NOT be tried tonight. You must appear on the date and at the time the trial is scheduled or a WARRANT will be issued for your arrest. At trial, you should be prepared to present any evidence you believe will help you in your defense. You may subpoena witnesses to testify on your behalf. The Court Administrator will provide you with subpoena forms, but you must serve the subpoena personally upon the witness. You should also bring with you any documents or other evidence you wish to present to the court. The rules of evidence apply at your trial, which may prevent some evidence you

may want to present from being admitted before the Judge. Both the City and you must comply with these rules during the trial. If you are found guilty, you can apply for a trial de novo in St. Louis County within 10 days of the judgment.

GUILTY PLEA: By pleading guilty, you admit that you committed the offense charged, that the law prohibits the act, and that you have no defense for your act. You are URGED not to plead guilty if you do not feel that you are guilty.

PLEA OF GUILTY WITH AN EXPLANATION: This plea has the same effect as a plea of guilty, but says that you would like to explain to the Judge mitigating circumstances with respect to the punishment only. An example of this type of plea is if you are charged with "Failure to Show Proof of Financial Responsibility." If you failed to show the police officer proof of insurance at the time of the stop, but had insurance coverage at the time, you should present the proof of insurance to the Judge. If you have obtained insurance since you were stopped you should show that to the Judge. If you actually had insurance on the date of your charge, the case will be dismissed. If you are charged with Driving While Suspended or Revoked and your license is now valid, you should present your license or paperwork from the Department of Revenue to the Judge.

PUNISHMENT

The court has the authority to assess fines up to \$1,000 and/or a jail sentence not to exceed 90 days on each charge. While most offenses are unlikely to result in a jail sentence, some of the more serious offenses (DWI, assault) carry that possibility, depending on the facts of the case. Some offenses, such as stealing or drug possession, may result in a jail sentence if it is not your first offense. Before trial, the Judge will determine if a jail sentence is likely upon conviction. If you are indigent, and the Judge believes that you would likely be sentenced to jail if you are found guilty, you are entitled to have an attorney appointed by the court to represent you.

FINES

In most cases, if you plead guilty or are found guilty, you will be assessed a fine. The amount of the fine assessed by the court is affected by the facts and the circumstances of the case. Mitigating circumstances may lower the fine. However, aggravating circumstances may increase the fine. The mitigating circumstances explained to the Judge may or may not have an effect on the amount of the fine assessed. If you cannot pay your fine tonight, the court will assign you a payment date approximately 30 days from today's date. If you cannot make a scheduled payment, you will need to appear in court that evening to show good cause for your failure to pay.

You cannot be sentenced to jail for your inability to pay. Alternative sentences, such as community service, are available for indigent persons. If you show good cause for failing to pay, the Judge can modify your sentence or ask you to perform community service in lieu of payment of fines. However, if you fail to appear to your hearing, a warrant can be issued for your arrest, and the Court can use any means authorized by law to collect the judgment. Additionally, you may be held in contempt of court and placed in jail if the Court finds that you have intentionally refused to pay your fines. If the Court intends to conduct a hearing to hold you in contempt for intentionally failing to pay your fines, you are entitled to have an attorney present. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed to you.

POINTS

For many traffic offenses, the Missouri Department of Revenue will assess points on your driving record if you are convicted. Court personnel, including the Judge, cannot give you legal advice about the potential impact of the points on your driving record. In some cases you may avoid points on your driving record by attending a driver improvement program. The cost is approximately \$55.00 and the program will take 8 hours. You must complete the driver improvement program within 60 days of your plea of guilty to avoid the assessment of points. You cannot utilize the driver improvement program to avoid points more than one time in a 3-year period. More information about the driver improvement program is available on the "Your Missouri Courts" Website (www.courts.mo.gov) under the Fine Collection Center section.

COURT COSTS

Court costs of \$26.50 per case are added to any fine assessed. Court costs are required by state law and the ordinances of the City of Town and Country.