



AGENDA REPORT

City Council Meeting

TODAY'S DATE: July 14, 2025

MEETING DATE: August 6, 2025

TO: Mayor Grimm and members of the City Council

FROM: Jason Welker, Planning and Community Development Director

SUBJECT: Council Direction on Potential Amendment to Sandpoint City Code §3-2-9 – Open Container Law

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this agenda item is to seek City Council direction on a proposed amendment to Sandpoint City Code §3-2-9 ("Open Container Law") to allow for the sale and consumption of alcohol at permitted special events held at (1) the James E. Russell Sports Center (JER) and (2) City Beach Park. Staff is not requesting adoption of the code amendment at this time but rather seeking Council feedback on the concept prior to drafting formal code language in collaboration with the Police Chief and legal counsel.

BACKGROUND:

Under current City Code, alcohol consumption in City parks is prohibited except in **Farmin Park** and **War Memorial Field**, and only when sold on site by an authorized vendor with a valid alcohol beverage catering permit for a permitted special event.

Recent requests by event organizers and potential renters of the James E. Russell Sports Center and City Beach Park highlight the need to revisit this policy:

- The **James E. Russell Sports Center** features a 60-person community room, a large covered patio, and a 30,000-square-foot indoor court area suitable for large-scale banquets, fundraisers, and other community events. Interest from groups that require the ability to serve alcohol suggests that expanding the code to allow alcohol at permitted events at JER would enhance its utility as a regional event venue and increase rental revenue.
- At **City Beach Park**, due to redevelopment at adjacent properties, some long-standing community events are seeking to relocate their staging and after-party activities to the park's central lawn area. These include public events that traditionally serve beer and wine, requiring the ability to allow alcohol in a managed, permitted setting.

Chief Coon has expressed cautious support for the proposal, particularly the idea of naming specific facilities (e.g., JER rather than the broader "Travers Park") in order to define and manage the scope of such permissions. He has also raised important legal and operational concerns, including:

- The challenge of denying permits for other events seeking to serve alcohol once the code is expanded.
- The need for clear, defensible criteria to guide approval and avoid legal exposure.

- Interest in how other regional jurisdictions manage alcohol at public waterfront parks (e.g., Coeur d'Alene and Post Falls).

DISCUSSION POINTS FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION

1. Should the City expand the list of parks/facilities where alcohol is allowed at permitted events?
 - Add *James E. Russell Sports Center* by name?
 - Add *City Beach Park*?
 - Limit to certain facilities within those parks?
2. Should the code amendment specify which events are allowed to serve alcohol, or retain a discretionary approval process by the Parks and Recreation Director and/or City Council?
3. How should the City ensure fair and consistent permitting while maintaining public safety and minimizing neighborhood or community concerns?
4. Is Council supportive of directing staff to work with the Police Chief and legal counsel to develop a draft ordinance and return for formal review and a public hearing?

NEXT STEPS:

If Council is generally supportive, staff will:

- Draft revised language for SCC §3-2-9;
- Coordinate with the Police Department and City Attorney;
- Bring a proposed amendment forward for formal consideration at a future Council meeting, including proper noticing for a public hearing.

ACTION:

None tonight, discussion item only

WILL THERE BE ANY FINANCIAL IMPACT? N HAS THIS ITEM BEEN BUDGETED? N/A

ATTACHMENTS:

- Sandpoint City Code 3-2-9: Open Container Law