

Justice of the Peace Precinct 4

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What does a “plea” mean?

A. Once a defendant is given notice of the charges filed, the defendant must enter a plea of “*guilty*” (admitting to the offense), “*nolo contendere*” (“*no contest*”) (not admitting guilt, but not contesting the charges filed, or “*not guilty*” (requiring a trial by judge or jury). A plea of “*guilty*” or “*nolo contendere*” (“*no contest*”) will result in a finding of guilt by the court, along with a penalty. A plea of “*not guilty*” will result in the case being set for a trial by judge or jury.

Q. Do I have to come to court?

A. Defendants must appear either (1) in person, (2) by mail, or (3) through an attorney. **Minors (under age 17) must appear before the court in person with a parent or legal guardian).**

Q. How long do I have to appear?

A. Your ticket (also called a citation) has an “***on or before***” date that was written in by the officer at the time the citation was issued. It is also called your appearance day. You can usually take care of your business with the court on or before your appearance day.

Q. What if the court is closed on my appearance day?

A. The citation states the appearance day is “***on or before***” the date given by the officer. However, if the appearance day falls on a weekend, holiday or day when the court is closed for some unforeseen reason, your appearance day will be the next business day of the court.

Q. Can I get an extension of my time to appear?

A. The courts will work with you on extensions but you must contact the court. This may vary according to each court’s policy as some courts may require you to request an extension in writing while others may grant an extension by appearing in person or calling the court.

Q. What if I just pay the fine?

A. If a defendant pays the fine without explanation, the court is authorized to accept the fine and enter the conviction as though the defendant appeared and entered a plea of “*nolo contendere*” (“*no contest*”). **A minor (under age 17) cannot pay the fine without appearing in court with a parent or guardian.**

Q. What if I cannot pay the fine?

A. If a defendant is unable to pay the fine, the court will work with the defendant with alternatives which may include, but not limited, to (1) a payment plan (2) community service. A request and explanation of circumstances must be made, to the court, in writing or in person.