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Rhode Island

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E-BIKE EFFORT ON THE WAY

MIDDLETOWN, R.I. (DECEMBER 4, 2023) – Middletown wants to step up its education and enforcement around the proper use of electric bicycles.

With more e-bikes zipping around town than ever before, local leaders agreed they need to work proactively to get additional attention around the issue before more riders get seriously hurt — or worse.

Town Solicitor Peter B. Regan and Police Capt. Jason Ryan pledged to work together on coming up with language to add to the town's ordinances, recommendations they said would be delivered at a future Town Council meeting for public review.

"It's about education and safety," council President Paul M. Rodrigues said. "That's all this is looking to do. It's not looking to bust everybody on an e-bike. It's educational awareness and to have that authority to enforce if there is an issue. That's all this is about."

As with most emerging technologies, local leaders acknowledged Middletown's rules were lagging behind what the community was actually seeing on its streets with electric bicycles — more commonly known as e-bikes.

During a recent council briefing, Ryan suggested the town add some of the verbiage from state law overseeing e-bikes to Middletown's rules guiding traditional bicycle use. That included legal definitions for what an e-bike is "a vehicle with a power output no greater than 1,491 watts, a maximum speed of 25 mph and fully operable pedals." To view that proposal, go to <https://www.middletownri.com/DocumentCenter/View/9946/EBike> online.

That sparked a conversation among the council, Ryan and Regan about how best to move forward.

Councilor Emily Tessier — who was instrumental in creating the town's Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee — said from her understanding, the General Assembly would be working during the upcoming legislative session to get new laws on the books.

With that in mind, Tessier suggested the town hold off on making any wholesale changes until the state figured out what was next.

In the meantime, she suggested Middletown might want to review its current ordinances on bicycles, which she said were last amended in the 1950s and make reference wooden bicycles and other outdated terminology. To view the town's existing rules on bicycles, go to https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/middletown/latest/middletown_ri/0-0-0-3402#JD Chapter73 online.

"If we're going to do something, I do think we should first update what a bicycle is," Tessier said.

Councilor Christopher Logan said if it was up to him, he'd like to see Middletown act now. Describing how one of his family members got into a serious accident involving an e-bike, Logan said he'd like to see more tools at the disposal of the Police Department — and community itself.

"Whatever we do, we need to do now," Logan said. "I'm not saying it's going to prevent something bad from happening, but if we educate just one kid, that will trickle down."

Rodrigues said whatever course the town takes, he wanted to make sure it helped with the problem, not create new ones. And like his fellow council members, Rodrigues said the educational component to the program was key because some might not be aware of the existing rules.

Document Link: <https://www.middletonri.com/DocumentCenter/View/9956/NYCU-EBike>