

W-B council plans ban on Square bike riding

By Denise Allabaugh
Staff Writer

Wilkes-Barre council wants to pass an ordinance to ban bicycle riding on Public Square.

Councilman Jim McCarthy said some kids who ride their bikes on Public Square bump into senior citizens and damage property.

"We want to make sure it's Public Square and not a race-track," McCarthy said. "It seems there is a different attitude with kids these days. They just don't seem to take into consideration that Public Square is for the public and it is not for skateboarding or bike riding."

Council will discuss the ordinance at a work session Tuesday at 6 p.m. and vote on it at a meeting Thursday at 6 p.m.

According to the ordinance, the penalty for anyone violating the ordinance is a \$25 fine for the first offense, \$50 for the second offense and \$300 for the third and subsequent of-

fense and/or jail time up to 90 days.

According to Wilkes-Barre Police Capt. Donald Crane, there is a state law that prohibits bicycle riding on sidewalks and in business districts.

Crane said police still have trouble with kids riding bikes on Public Square. Stunt bikes are a particular problem, he said.

"They are a problem on the Square where people bring children and there are handicapped people and elderly people," Crane said. "There is a section of the vehicle code that states they shouldn't be on sidewalks."

Solicitor Bill Vinsko said the city ordinance was needed because Public Square is legally considered a public park.

"It's a belt and suspenders action to supplement the state law," Vinsko said.

Councilman Phil Latinski supports passing an ordinance to prohibit bike-riding on Pub-

lic Square as long as it is enforced.

A 1987 ordinance prohibited skateboarding on Public Square, but Latinski still sees kids skateboarding here.

In 1997, former Mayor Tom McGroarty tried to amend the skateboarding ordinance to prohibit rollerblading. After strong opposition, the ordinance never passed.

"The skateboarders take chips out of the steps. We have an ordinance against them, but I never see anyone arrested," Latinski said. "An ordinance is only

good if it is enforced."

Latinski said he is not only in favor of banning skateboarding and bike riding on Public Square, but he wants rollerblading banned as well.

"Someone can be seriously hurt and the city could be sued," Latinski said. "People walk through there and rollerbladers and bike riders put people in danger when they're walking. I'm for prohibition of that activity on Public Square."

Rich Adams, owner of Around Town Bicycles in Wilkes-Barre, feels kids should be allowed to ride their bikes on Public Square with some rules and boundaries.

"There's worse things the kids could be doing. You can't just ban kids from places. You have to give them alternatives," Adams said.

McGroarty proposed to build a skate park in 1997 after hearing much opposition about the proposal to ban in-line skating on Public Square. The skate

park was never built.

Adams feels if city officials want to ban bike riding on Public Square, they should build a "BMX park."

"Public Square is a good spot for BMX bikes since there are different concrete levels. It's better than flat-riding," Adams said.

Councilman Tony Thomas, however, complained bike riders on Public Square are damaging the new benches the Leadership Wilkes-Barre Class of 2004 refurbished.

Thomas is not only in favor of banning bike riding on Public Square, but he wants to add an amendment to ban bike riding in Kirby Park during city events such as the Cherry Blossom Festival and the Fourth of July celebration.

During these events, he believes people should walk their bikes through the park so they do not put others in danger.

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