

City eyes scooter regulations, adding mobility options

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A man lines up electric scooters on an Atlanta street corner in June 2019 after charging them overnight.

AP File

The city of Bowling Green is looking at ways it can – and can't – regulate shared scooter services in the city.

At the same time, the city is open to considering an expansion of efforts such as shared bicycle services in the city, even as it was announced Friday that Western Kentucky University's two-year-old bike sharing service is ending.

Shared scooter services – in which people rent scooters, often electric-powered, that are parked in public places – has been a contentious issue in many municipalities. The main issues regard safety and concerns when the scooters are dumped on sidewalks, streets or private property instead of designated areas.

Some places have outright banned the services, while others have strict regulations.

But because of Kentucky law, “the city can't ban scooters, but we can regulate where they go and where they park,” Bowling Green Mayor Bruce Wilkerson said.



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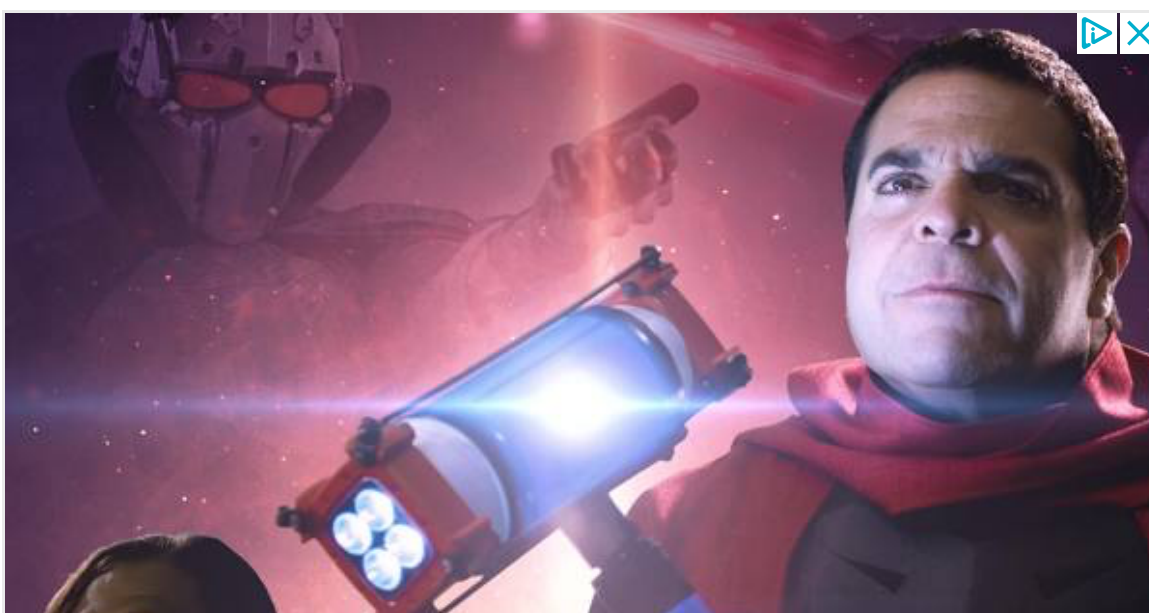
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Bowling Green officials at a city retreat last week said they are waiting to get further clarity on what the city can and can't do under state law: "As soon as that regulation comes down, we will probably have a work session," Wilkerson said.

"We want to make sure they are not a problem like in Nashville," Wilkerson said.



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Nashville Mayor David Briley last summer proposed banning shared scooter services in that city after a scooter rider was struck and killed by an SUV, and after numerous complaints about the scooters being dumped on and blocking city sidewalks. Because of similar safety concerns, the Chattanooga, Tenn., City Council voted to extend a ban on scooters last week.

In Kentucky, new safety initiatives were recently announced in Lexington after a scooter rider was hit and killed by a car in November.



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“The main concern is a lack of infrastructure to support these devices,” said Brent Childers, city Department of Neighborhood and Community Services director. He said scooters fall somewhere “between a pedestrian and a vehicle,” so neither sidewalks nor busy roads are suited for them.

He also said it is a common sight in some larger cities to “see them all over the sidewalks impeding traffic and taking up parking spaces.”



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The congestion and safety issues are more prevalent with scooters than bikes, as people “grew up riding bikes and they generally abide by traffic regulations,” Wilkerson said. Many scooter users “don’t follow traffic laws in a way to keep themselves and other people safe.”

No bike or scooter sharing service has formally asked to start operations in Bowling Green, Wilkerson said, although one scooter service did contact city officials last year.

There has been a bike sharing service on the campus of Western Kentucky University since 2018, but it was announced Friday that it was ending.

VeoRide will cease its bike sharing services at WKU at the end of February.

Jennifer Tougas, WKU’s Director of Parking and Transportation Services, said the service was well received by students and the decision to end it was made by the company as it looks to focus on other transportation services.

WKU and the city are now in discussions to consider if there is a way to partner to bring other “micro-mobility” services to the campus and the city.

Tougas described micro-mobility as getting people the last few miles to a destination. That could entail using traditional bikes, bikes with small motors, seated scooters like Vespas or even small on-demand electric vehicles.

“WKU has a continuing interest” in providing micro-mobility services, she said.

Likewise, “We are interested in talking to them,” Childers said.

With new bicycle lanes being built as part of continuing downtown renovations, Childers said there are new opportunities to invest in these types of services.

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