

Council Rejects City's Bike Ban

Sol Plafkin

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Intelligence finally reigned supreme recently when Detroit's Common Council tore apart Ray Girardin's stupid proposal to ban motorcycles from city parks without a special permit.

The proposal was immediately condemned by the American Civil Liberties Union as unconstitutional and in violation of the civil liberties of individuals because of its vagueness.

Even Councilman Philip Van Antwerp, a former police inspector, had to admit that it was unconstitutional.

Several fairly well-dressed bike-riders, including a 55-year-old grandmother, testified that the ban would be penalizing more than 30,000 persons in the metropolitan Detroit area for the alleged rowdyism of 100 or so individuals.

The Council members were unanimous in criticizing the proposal as unfair discrimination against law-abiding cyclists who have as much right to use city parks as any other citizen.

"We'd feel ridiculous in having to request a permit if we wanted to take a motorcycle ride in the park," several councilmen commented.

Girardin had idiotically suggested the ordinance after the trouble at last April's Love-in at Belle Isle. His asinine suggestion led to the subsequent Hate-in at River Rouge.

Observers of Detroit police could have easily predicted that the cops would do their best to create riot at the Rouge Hate-in by provoking trouble—an naturally that's the very thing that came off. One witness testified that he saw police deliberately beat people up who were violating no law and that the officers also destroyed valuable equipment.

Councilman Mel Ravit queried, "OK, you might have an excuse for hurting a person who might be dangerous, but how can you justify the destruction of sitting motorcycles that couldn't possibly harm anyone?"

As would be expected, the police failed to reply.

The real culprit in this matter is the office of the Corporation Counsel.

They're supposed to draft ordinances and make sure that a law is constitutionally sound before it is submitted to the Council for consideration.

Assistant Corporation Counsel John Hathaway first said that he only approved the ordinance for form -and he then proceeded to defend its substance, saying that the Council had the power to pass any ordinance it wished as long as it alleged that it was for the protection of the peace, health, and safety of the community.

Even the head of the Department of Parks and Recreation, which would have had the power-together with the police department—to grant permits under the abortive ordinance, was opposed to it.

The Council didn't kill the bill on the spot, but gently referred it back to the Corporation Counsel for redrafting. After the day's shellacking it is unlikely the matter will ever arise again.

Council members were not too happy with the complete disrespect for their intelligence that was shown by the city's legal agency.

"You're supposed to be the lawyers, not us!" they exclaimed.

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