

Item 23-0285: Approve Memorandum of Understanding with Bird Rides, Inc. to initiate a Dockless, Stand-up Electric Scooter Program for 2023

Common Council

Wed, Apr 05, 2023 7:00PM

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:57:16

Okay, we'll move on to the next item from Municipal Services Committee. This is item 23-0285 approve memorandum of understanding with Bird rides 2023. Need a motion. Okay, we have a motion. Is there a second? We have motion and a second to approve. Alright, open the floor for discussion. Alder Meltzer.

Alderman Vered Meltzer (District 2) 1:57:57

Thank you. I would like to encourage all of my colleagues to vote against this tonight. I know that Bird scooters have a lot of inherent value. I know—and I'm not here to question or debate any of the good that bird scooters bring. I do think though, that what the pilot programs have shown is that Bird scooters are not the right fit for Appleton. In Appleton—in Wisconsin, we bear a wonderful national title of drinking a lot. And in the city of Wisconsin, we have so many bars spaced so densely that it is impossible to stage Bird scooters, to intentionally stage them away from bars. I think that the combination of the drinking culture in Appleton and the safety issues that I hear increasing at the hospitals would only continue increasing if we continue to have Bird scooters.

Alderman Vered Meltzer (District 2) 1:59:05

I do believe that Appleton is just not a good place for this program. I think that bird scooters do wonderful things in other communities. And perhaps in the future they would be a good addition to Appleton, but I think that we have other safety issues, infrastructure issues, public health issues that we need to address before our community is ready. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 1:59:31

Alder Wolff.

Alderman Nate Wolff (District 12) 1:59:32

Thank you, Your Honor. I think that those, some of those points are very good points. I would say that I think the city should look at enforcing helmets, mandatory helmets, for scooter riders and look into that more aggressively. But I know that that enforcement is seemingly impossible. Um, I'm still going to support the Bird scooter program, but I would say that it needs to be turned around because I may not support it in the future, and likely won't if it isn't.

Mayor Jake Woodford 2:00:19

Alder Del Toro.

Alderman Israel Del Toro (District 4) 2:00:23

Thank you, Mayor. I personally find myself enjoying the benefits of Bird scooters as an able-bodied, middle-aged person. And I find that, you know, I've come to Council meetings in a Bird scooter before, and I find them very practical and accessible. Students on my campus do so as well. However, in this case, I am going to be voting against Bird scooters to reflect the vote of my constituents, particularly the heavy votes from the Eagle Point Community where seniors have ran into dangerous situations with Bird scooters along the trails. Now, thank you to the Municipal Services staff who have already implemented a slow zone in this area to try and mitigate those efforts, but nevertheless, those complaints continue to rise. And because they have repeatedly expressed their

concern over this, my vote tonight reflects not my personal belief but those of my constituents who have been not supportive. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 2:01:33
Alder van Zeeland.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 2:01:36

Thank you Chair. I feel very comfortable with this safety options that were offered to us from the representative from bird including the test to make sure that people are not intoxicated and also the ID check that they can turn on and off to ensure that it's not children who are using the scooters. So, I'm going to vote for this. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 2:01:59
Alder Alfheim.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 2:02:01

Thank you, chair. I wish in a number of situations we could just legislate away the dumbness of how things are used. Right? I mean, if we could just—I know personally multiple people that have been involved in accidents, including the shattering of bones, not in Appleton, moot point. But it all had to do with alcohol. We can't make alcohol go away. We can't make people choose to or choose not to. We can't legislate away the dumbness.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 2:02:38

I'm not sure that I love the Bird scooters. I think in my experience, they're used—they're being used more for entertainment as opposed to necessity. However, I do believe the necessity exists, due to the grocery store type issues. I do believe there are some people that do rely on them to be able to get to point A point B fast faster than a bicycle. So, I'm torn on the issue.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 2:03:06

I listened to the Bird representative and the id—you know there's things that they can do. I would like them, and I asked from the beginning, to shut down the speed as soon as they're anywhere near College Avenue. I would love that. Let them be used outside of it. I've not heard that that's being used as an option.

Aldersperson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 2:03:28

I think again, if the habits of those using them were augmented, we wouldn't be having this conversation. But we can't. So, we will find them laying in the sidewalks. We will find them driving down College Avenue. We will find them with people in accidents. And if we choose to have them then that's going to continue. So, my hope is with the reconfiguration of College Avenue making the bike lanes more accessible, using all the things that we are doing right now in terms of paths, that we won't need them in the long run—need the scooters in the long. We can get rid of them as a nuisance. For now, I will vote yes because we don't have those resources available at this time. So, I'm voting yes even though I'm not excited about it.

Mayor Jake Woodford 2:04:18
Alder Doran or Croatt, did you did you need? Alder Doran? Okay, alder Doran.

Aldersperson Chad Doran (District 15) 2:04:25

Thank you. Again, want to commend the staff for continuing to work on this contract with Bird scooters to take, taking the feedback that we've gotten from some community members and from some Council and committee

members to make this more palatable, I think for at least some of us, certainly. And so, I just didn't want that to go unnoticed.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 2:04:50

From my standpoint, my biggest issue with this sort of most recent iteration was a concern that we weren't necessarily even being reimbursed for the cost that the city invests in allowing the Bird scooters to be here. But in my mind, it goes beyond that in that there should be at least some offset for the parts of the community that really want nothing to do with Bird scooters in terms of us being able to generate some additional revenue from it beyond just recouping the city's costs. And the sort of number I was thinking in my head, I guess, is where the staff was able to settle with Bird scooters. So, I feel very comfortable with that.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 2:05:30

I would, I would add that I also appreciate this is still a one-year sort of renewable contract, which I think is important. Not a fan of making things like this, programs like this, into permanent situations, for the very reason that we have the opportunity then to continue to address issues or things that might come up and cancel the program if we feel that's a better solution. So, I appreciate that that is still the option for us here as well.

Alderson Chad Doran (District 15) 2:06:01

I know that that there are still a lot of concerns about these going forward. But given that the vote we just took to add bike lanes to downtown. I think it helps address one of the issues that the police department had brought up about enforcement. I know that we continue to hear other questions about enforcement of use, and how we don't have the resources to do that. So, I think as I said earlier, that's another underlying issue we have to continue to address. But I think that this will—this is something that we have to do at this point, given the vote we just took to add the bike lanes to College Avenue to continue to offer another option for people, and we can revisit again next year once we have a sense of how that that may change. The usage may change here from the downtown perspective with a new pilot project. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 2:06:56

Alder Schultz

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 2:06:58

Thank you, chair. Just want to share some personal anecdotes and why I'm going to continue to support this at least for now. I've always been a strong proponent of the program, because myself and my family have used this type of scooter in lots of different urban centers maybe larger than Appleton, but use them in a way that was probably not just getting from point A to point B for a work related thing, or not using them to go get groceries, but actually using them as a sort of an entertainment vehicle to see a lot of a place that we might not otherwise be able to do up close and personal or not stuck inside of a vehicle or getting out and having to walk. So, it gave us—excuse me—gave us an opportunity experience more of a place. Appleton is not that large. You can probably do that. But for me, that was the real benefit of them.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 2:07:50

And I do appreciate that they are dangerous. You know, you really have to be paying close attention to what you're doing when you're when you're operating these vehicles. And I understand that there's some inherent dangers and that we have had some accidents. And we continue to monitor that. I think there are means of controlling that. Bird has the ability to meter down the speeds wherever they wish to. If we want to decide that these zones aren't working for us, or maybe we're allowing slightly too much speed to be, to take place in certain zones. You know, we've limited them from bridges, we've created a downtown zone, we can continue to do that and monitor that and adjust areas if they become problematic.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 2:08:35

I do think that having them is one of those amenities that makes the city look attractive and more livable and more vibrant, based on people who may be traveling here from other places, both nationally, internationally and having experienced those elsewhere, as I have done. And that's probably why I was such a strong proponent to begin with.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 2:08:54

I do struggle as many of us do with the continued safety issues and particularly with underage use, use without helmet. We didn't have those with us when we were traveling somewhere. So, I don't expect that would be something most people will adjust themselves to and avail themselves of. But I do think there's some value to them. And again, as since it's a one-year program, we're can continue to monitor this, see what's happening in our community, and address the you know, the acute situations that arise.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 2:09:22

And yeah, there's potential significant issues that happened, but with this new bike lane that we're we approved, I think that should take some of the stress off of our businesses, our pedestrians who are using downtown and other zones, and also the ability of parties in nested areas so they're not as unsightly as they have been in the past. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 2:09:45

Alder Alfheim.

Alderson Kristin Alfheim (District 11) 2:09:46

Thank you, Chair. I would ask if we have, if Bird has all of those mechanisms they can pull, then my strong recommendation dealing with the alcohol issues after hours, why don't we just ask them to reduce the speed after a certain time in the day? I don't think it's that hard, right? So just, let's ask them if we move the speed down. Instead of 15 miles an hour, give them seven, give them five. So at least if they're gonna get on, they're not going to do as much harm to themselves or others. If we could ask if we can perhaps do that.

Mayor Jake Woodford 2:10:23

Okay. All right. Any other discussion? Hearing none, please cast your votes.

Mayor Jake Woodford 2:10:58

Motion passes 12 to 3 with Alders Meltzer, Del Toro, and Thao opposed.