

Downtown skateboarding ban frustrates local commuters

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Asheville contradicts itself when it advocates green thinking and active lifestyles while banning skateboarding, a legitimate form of transportation, from the downtown areas, according to local skateboarders.

"People can go to the park and play basketball, but if I went there and stepped on my skateboard, people would frown upon it, cops might pull up and tell me to leave," said UNC Asheville junior and skateboarder Peter Goehrke.

The city's decision to prohibit people from skating downtown presents problems to students who commute via skateboards and attempt to travel without using fuel, according to Goehrke.

Violators of the downtown skateboarding ordinance must appear in nuisance court, which the city established last August.

"I do it to get from point A to point B for the most part, but I like street skating. There's some good spots around here," he said.

Goehrke, who began skating in middle school 10 years ago, skates to school and downtown on his skateboard, but said he often fears police will stop him if he skates in the wrong places.

According to campus police, students may skateboard on campus if they are not interfering with traffic or presenting a hazard to pedestrians.

"It's kind of like the bike laws," said Sgt. B.J. Bayne from campus police. "You can ride to the far right side of the road, just not on sidewalks, not on handles going down the sidewalks."

Offenders of the ordinance may also have to do community service and pay court costs, according to the ordinance. According to Goehrke, police stopped him and his friends for skating downtown and his friends received \$125 tickets.

"As soon as she left we hopped back on our boards. She circled around the



Megan Dombroski- Staff Photographer

PUSH Skateshop-sponsored Nohe Weir-Villator, 20, skates in a skatepark in West Asheville.

block and I bolted," he said.

Campus police do not allow skating on sidewalks or railings and confiscate boards if students disobey too many times, according to Robbie Craig, a police officer at UNCA.

"It's because it's a liability. You could run into somebody that's walking and doesn't see you," he said.

UNCA is more lenient toward skaters, even though it is part of the Asheville city limits, according to Craig.

"After so many warnings, they're going to take the skateboard," he said. "It's not something we deal with a lot."

Goehrke said the laws in his hometown of Raleigh resemble Asheville's, but police show more leniency toward skateboarders.

"If a security guard or cop sees you

skating, they will definitely kick you out, but they're not as fast to write tickets in Raleigh as they are here," he said.

The Asheville ordinance went into effect during the 1940s, and recently law enforcement began charging skaters more harshly, according to Rob Sebrell, owner of PUSH Skateshop and Gallery on Patton Avenue.

According to Craig, officials increase fines and treat issues like skateboarding more severely when accidents occur.

"Anytime they step up efforts like that, it's because they've had a lot of complaints," he said. "There's been a problem or someone got hurt."

Roads downtown often contain potholes and blindspots, making it easy for accidents to occur while skating or walking, according to Bayne.

"I'm sure it could be a liability issue, too. Pothole not filled in, they hit it, wreck, get hit by a car. Especially inside the city," she said.

Krista Hill, owner of Flipside Boardshop in downtown Asheville, said she supports skateboarding rights but prefers to stay out of the politics.

"One thing I never liked about being involved with things like skateboarding is, my position as a store manager, it's a little political. So I try to stay out of it," she said. "Because I support skateboarders, I want to see people have the same rights to commute on a skateboard as they do on a bike."

According to Hill, she supports the use

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