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Bikers win a reprieve on noise

La Grange council to rework ordinance

By **Andrea Uhde**
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The Courier-Journal

Motorcycle riders, many clad in Harley-Davidson shirts and hats, swarmed the La Grange City Council meeting Monday night to oppose proposed rules that target loud noises, including the revving of motorcycle engines.

"I think it's petty," said Belinda Cowan, a motorcycle rider for 25 years and one of more than 50 people in the crowd. "That's an easy way for the county to get money ... to fine you for noise pollution."

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Facing the objections, the City Council agreed to have the proposed noise ordinance rewritten to better address the riders' concerns.

Several riders told the council that motorcycles need to be loud for safety reasons. They said the noise scares away animals and alerts drivers that they're nearby. Cowan, 46, said she changed the

pipes on her Harley to make it louder. "It wasn't because it was cool," she said. "It's for safety. People watch TV or wear earphones when they're driving."

Neil Mesker, of La Grange, said the ordinance would be unfair.

"I ride a motorcycle, and I've got loud cars," he told the City Council. "I feel like I'm a 10-year-old again and I've got a curfew."

The proposed noise ordinance was sparked by a number of complaints -- the most common concerning revving motorcycle engines, said Shirley Hudson, the city's code-compliance mediator.

She said motorcycles driving through town are not the problem.

"It's the person that is sitting in the driveway or the street just revving the motor for an hour at a time. That's what bothers people," she said.

The rules the City Council rejected were almost identical to those in effect in Louisville. Under the proposal, for example, residents would be in violation if they sounded a car horn for "an unreasonable period of time" or turned up car stereos so high that they disturb the peace and quiet of others.

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The duration of the noise, the time of day or night it occurs, and its volume were among the standards that would be considered in determining if there was a violation.

More than a dozen exemptions were included, such as noise from construction or lawn mowers between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m.

A person who violated the proposed ordinance could have been fined \$100 to \$250. A second violation within two years could have brought a fine of \$250 to \$500 and/or up to 60 days in jail. A third offense in two years could have brought a fine of at least \$500 and/or up to 180 days behind bars.

City Attorney Wade Helm said the council probably won't consider a revised noise ordinance until its Aug. 7 meeting at the earliest.

Council members did not list specific changes for the ordinance Monday. They did seem to agree, however, that the new ordinance should specify that people would be cited for being too loud only if a resident calls in a complaint.

Reporter Andrea Uhde can be reached at (502) 582-4663.

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