

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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## **Skipping Scooters**

With the cold weather upon us and the multiple snowstorms this month, it can be difficult to remember outdoor activities that don't involve skis or ice skates. Icy sidewalks and snow-filled streets can make outdoor travel a tricky ordeal, so most of us have reluctantly stored away both bikes and scooters until springtime arrives in New England. When warmer weather finally does return, however, the residents of our town, and those all over Massachusetts will have a few new regulations to be aware of before pulling out their helmets and taking a ride.

At the end of November, Massachusetts passed legislation that places strict regulations on motorized scooters and mini-motorcycles in the Commonwealth. The legislation specifically targets tandem wheeled scooters that are equipped with a small gasoline engine or an electric motor, sometimes known as "go-peds", and frequently used by youngsters on sidewalks and public streets.

According to the new regulations, operators of these vehicles must be at least sixteen years of age and possess a valid driver's license or learner's permit. Scooters will be prohibited from roadways on which bicycles are prohibited and they cannot travel faster than 20 mph. Individuals operating these vehicles must wear a helmet at all times, are banned from recreational or bike paths, must travel between sunrise and sunset, and may face fines of up to \$100 for violating these regulations.

The new state law should make the town's recently adopted scooter bylaw more palatable to Longmeadow devotees of the mini-vehicles.

Our town of Longmeadow acted even earlier than the state when last year's annual town meeting voted to ban the use of most scooters in town using this broad language: "No person shall operate a motorized scooter, motorized skateboard, or other similar motorized motor vehicle on any public way, sidewalk, playground, or on any property owned by the town. Exceptions to this include handicapped vehicles, vehicles used for landscaping purposes, and anything deemed as an exception through the laws of the state.

One interesting exception to the new regulations is the use of the Segway, also known as the "Human Transporter." The Segway is the recently invented self-balancing, electric-powered transportation device that essentially consists of a platform, two wheels and a balance/handle bar. Gaining popularity in warehouse and office settings, it is specifically excluded from the new state regulations and set aside for later consideration. As it stands, most towns tend to take a case-by-case approach regarding the use of Segways, as they are not a prevalent use of transportation and most often seen in parades.

Growing up in an era of bicycles, roller-skates and scooters, it has surprised me to see and hear the little mini-bikes zipping around the neighborhoods of Longmeadow. The new town bylaw seemed limiting to some. The more restrictive state law, however, appears to validate the town's concerns about the nuisance of such small vehicles and the safety of their young operators. When spring comes and the ice and snow melt away from our sidewalks, we will again have people-powered bicycles, skates and skate-boards helping our kids get to and from school and all of their other activities.