

# Bristol council further defines noise in approving new ordinance

01:00 AM EDT on Thursday, October 11, 2007

By Alex Kuffner

## Journal Staff Writer

BRISTOL — In response to complaints of loud motorcycles roaring down local streets, the Town Council last night approved an ordinance that aims to tighten noise regulations.

The municipal ordinance, passed by a unanimous vote, gives a broader definition for what is considered an excessive or offensive noise and does not necessarily require a complaint be verified by a noise meter, which the previous version of the law called for. Instead, the new ordinance defines a violation in two ways: a noise level that exceeds the ambient noise by five decibels or a noise “audible to a person of reasonably sensitive hearing at a distance of 200 feet from its source.”

The ordinance, which was modeled on a Providence law, also forbids loud engine noise, “such as blatantly excessive engine revving ... and acceleration resulting in unnecessary, excessive or offensive noise....”

Although council members were careful to say that the law aims to crack down on all disturbers of the peace, including cars and loud engines or loud stereos, several spoke specifically about what they perceived to be a growing problem with motorcycles rumbling along the waterfront or around downtown, especially in the summer.

“Everybody knows how outrageous they’ve gotten,” said Council member Mary Parella. “Hopefully, the message will get out that we won’t tolerate it as much.”

“This is not singling out strictly motorcycles,” said her colleague David Barboza, who pushed for the change. “This is aimed at probably the two percent of motorcyclists who need to have people hear them from eight blocks away.”

State law regulates the sounds motor vehicles are allowed to produce, setting limits measured in decibels on engine noise and music from stereos or radios. Police officers can stop any noisy vehicles and issue a ticket if there’s evidence that their engines have been illegally changed to emit excess noise. In the case of motorcycles, that could mean drilling holes in the engine’s baffle or removing it altogether.

But, according to Barboza, it does not allow them to issue tickets without evidence that an engine has been illegally changed or without data from a noise meter. The new local law will allow them to do that.

“It’s using common sense,” Barboza said.

Last night, Lou Petrucci, a lobbyist for the Rhode Island Motorcycle Association, spoke to the council members. “I like the wording,” he told its members. “We have taken the position that motorcyclists should be operating responsibly.”

He also advised the town to put up signs publicizing its strict enforcement of noise ordinances. It’s something that’s been done in Newport and works, he said. [akuffner@projo.com](mailto:akuffner@projo.com)

