

MEMO

TO: Chairperson Davis and Committee Members
FROM: Andrew Beyer, P.E.
DATE: May 29, 2024
RE: Public Safety & Welfare Committee Meeting of June 5, 2024 at 5:00 pm

Item: Review and take action: Allowing Utility Terrain Vehicles (UTVs) on select City Streets

Background:

As the Director of Public Works/City Engineer for the City of Watertown, I have concerns regarding the proposal to allow utility terrain vehicles (UTVs) to use our city streets. While UTVs offer recreational benefits and practical uses in rural or off-road environments, their presence on urban roads poses considerable risks to traffic safety for several reasons:

1. **Vehicle Design and Compatibility:** UTVs are designed primarily for off-road use. Their structural design, including higher centers of gravity and lower stability compared to passenger vehicles, makes them less suitable for paved roads. This can increase the likelihood of rollovers and other accidents, particularly when making sharp turns or sudden maneuvers.
2. **Traffic Flow Disruption:** The speed capabilities and driving dynamics of UTVs differ significantly from those of standard motor vehicles. These differences can disrupt the flow of traffic, leading to potential collisions or near-misses. Drivers of traditional vehicles may have difficulty anticipating the movements of UTVs, increasing the risk of accidents.
3. **Safety Standards:** Unlike passenger vehicles, UTVs often lack essential safety features such as airbags, crumple zones, turn signals, and advanced braking systems. Additionally, these vehicles may not meet the stringent safety standards required for on-road use, putting both the operators of UTVs and other road users at greater risk.
4. **Pedestrian Safety:** The presence of UTVs on city streets could pose additional risks to pedestrians. These vehicles are less visible and audible compared to traditional vehicles, making it harder for pedestrians to detect their approach. This can be particularly dangerous in residential areas, school zones, and other places with high foot traffic.

In light of these concerns, I oppose the proposal to allow UTVs on city streets. The primary responsibility of our public infrastructure is to ensure the safety and well-being of all residents and road users. Introducing UTVs into this environment would undermine this goal by introducing unnecessary risks and potential dangers to the traveling public.