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ValleyBike Share readying to roll again: Eight-town e-bicycle network gears up for relaunch



ValleyBike Share is expected to return later this spring to the eight municipalities that participate in the e-bicycle network. GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

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Published: 04-11-2024 5:23 PM

Modified: 04-11-2024 5:55 PM

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AMHERST — About 500 electric-assisted bicycles at 78 stations in eight area communities could be returning later this spring as ValleyBike Share gets ready to relaunch with a new vendor.

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Amherst this week became one of the final communities to enter into a revised inter-municipal governmental agreement that includes Northampton as the lead community, along with Easthampton, Holyoke, South Hadley, Chicopee, Springfield and West Springfield. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and the University of Massachusetts Amherst are also partners in the regional collaboration.

The Town Council voted unanimously to support the new agreement.

“The hope is that bikes will be back out on the street by late spring or early summer,” said Assistant Town Manager David Ziomek.

ValleyBike Share was dormant in 2023 after Bowegen, the Canadian vendor, went bankrupt. The various stations set up in the communities, and on UMass campus, will be coordinated by a new vendor being sought by Northampton.

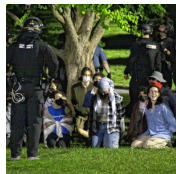
Carolyn Misch, director of Northampton’s Office of Planning & Sustainability, wrote in an email that more information about the new vendor for ValleyBike Share will be released later this month.

Amherst will be responsible for paying \$54,500 this year, to be covered by funding reserves for sustainability projects, while the maximum operational costs for Amherst in 2025 and 2026 would be \$82,000 each year, with the money coming from sustainability or transportation funds, or a combination.

The program originally launched with a variety of pricing and usage options, including a \$90 annual founding membership, an \$80 annual membership and a \$20 monthly membership, with a \$2 charge for a single-trip pass and a \$6 charge for a day pass. Bikes could be checked out and returned to any station within the ValleyBike system.

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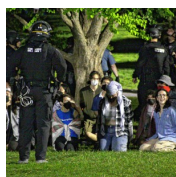
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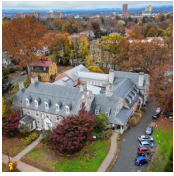
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The vote on the agreement came after Town Council got a memo from Sustainability Director Stephanie Ciccarello.

“The ValleyBike Share program was successful,” Ciccarello said. “The demise of the program was not really the program itself, it was the vendor that we were using who had networks worldwide that went bankrupt.”

“The new vendor has a different business model and we think we will have much more success with the new vendor,” she added.

Ciccarello said the communities that are part of the agreement expect revenue for memberships, advertisers and users will offset some of the costs and reduce overall expenses.

The costs to relaunch are being apportioned based on 500 bikes and \$1,200 per bike. The payments will be \$157,800 for Springfield, \$145,600 for Northampton, \$91,000 for Holyoke, \$54,500 for Amherst, \$48,500 for UMass, \$36,200 for Easthampton, \$24,250 for both Chicopee and South Hadley and \$18,200 for West Springfield.

Ciccarello said it will be a smaller system initially, since the new vendor will be working with what already exists, with bikes in storage. The new vendor will be examining equipment to see what works and what doesn't.

The aim is to have 750 bikes in 2025, which will increase the costs by a third. The new vendor will operate and maintain the existing bikes and stations.

Ziomek said Amherst could face a challenge to fund, though sponsorship and other means can bring those costs down. “This will potentially be challenging for us,” Ziomek said.

ValleyBike Share is an important part of the regional transportation infrastructure that also includes the PVTa buses, he said.

“I think we all believe in the program, it was very popular, we would like to have it on our streets again,” Ziomek said.

District 1 Councilor Cathy Schoen said ridership numbers for Amherst are impressive. During the last year in operation, in 2022, in Amherst, there were 40,849 rides combined between Amherst and UMass, 27,076 in Northampton and 14,926 in Holyoke.

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