

Community turns out to support Lyft and Uber in Monroe

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An ordinance that drafts the framework for transportation network companies to enter Monroe moved forward at Monroe City Council earlier this week.

Dozens turned out in support of the ordinance, which will be presented for final adoption on July 25. For many, the conversation surrounding Uber, Lyft and the city government started early on Tuesday at roeLa Roaster, where refreshments were offered prior to a parade to city hall. Byron Bailey, roeLa Roaster owner, said the idea came to him as he was sitting at the counter in the coffee shop one evening.

He knew the Uber ordinance would be on the council agenda and could see city hall in the distance — the idea took off from there. Bailey supports the ordinance and the introduction of transportation network companies, or TNCs, as a method of boosting local businesses and dealing with routine concerns, like catching a ride to the airport. The event Tuesday was a way to turn his support, and the support of others, into action. “It’s wonderful to make a suggestion to a friend but those thoughts don’t become a reality if you don’t take action,” Bailey said. “...I hope this is a call to action for people to get involved with the city council,” he continued.

Friday Ellis, owner of Governors Cigar and Pipe, said the introduction of Uber or Lyft would be a quality of life piece for the community. Many who attended the event believed the introduction of TNCs would be a boost for the local nightlife, both restaurants and bars, as people could more easily drink responsibly.

“I think we definitely need it,” Logan Parker, a Monroe resident, said. “For this area, the amount of DWIs and tickets, there is definitely a need for it for public safety.” Parker has used local taxi services in the past and said a short ride from downtown to the area of Ray’s PeGe cost as much as \$60-70 and service took 30 minutes to an hour to arrive.

He said the ability to see who your driver is, where they are and when they will arrive on a TNC app is a major plus.

Mario Mata, owner of Avocado’s, said he felt the introduction of a TNC

would benefit the region and be good for restaurants, where many would like to enjoy a margarita or two with dinner.

"Living here and going to other places in Louisiana, I've always felt we needed a better service in taxis here," he said.

Tommy Stewart owns the Brass Monkey on De-Siard Street and said his experience with nightlife in Monroe is that it has declined over the past 10 years.

A TNC would allow both customers and potential employees without driver's licenses to visit and work downtown.

He also said it would help promote additional growth as people could be safely dropped off and picked up at the doors of businesses in areas with underlit parking, particularly in areas that still suffer from a stigma, such as downtown.

At Tuesday's meeting, Mayor Jamie Mayo said he supported the ordinance in its present form, and reiterated that it needed to be vetted when it was originally brought to the council on March 28. Mayo also told the crowd, city discussions with Lyft indicate that company is on board with the ordinance. Uber had previously told the city they would not be expanding in Louisiana anymore following the failure of statewide legislation regulating TNCs. More recent discussions indicate that Uber may still be interested, but the mayor said he would not support tabling the ordinance again at the company's request. "We support Uber," Mayo said. "I just want to set the record clear tonight. We support the transportation network companies ordinance."

Gretchen Ezernack was elected council chair at the Tuesday meeting and Juanita Woods was elected to a second year as vice-chair.