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Published: Tuesday, November 25, 2008

## Monroe dog ordinance skips label for some breeds

### Specific breeds won't be considered 'potentially dangerous'

By [Debra Smith](#)  
Herald Writer

MONROE -- Pit bulls, Akitas and other breeds targeted by a city proposal as potentially dangerous are out of the dog house -- for now.

The City Council, bombarded by unhappy dog owners, passed an interim ordinance that keeps a warning strike for all dogs, but did not contain any language that targeted certain breeds.

The ordinance approved 6-0 by the council last week would expire after 180 days if no further action is taken.

That gives the council extra time to wade through research on dangerous dog legislation sent to the council from dozens of agencies and dog organizations, said City Councilman Mitch Ruth, who opposed the breed-specific language.

"We're trying to find an ordinance that gives adequate teeth for enforcement," he said. "We want to ensure public safety without using breed-specific language."

The ordinance that the council did pass last week includes a provision that makes it illegal for owners to take their dogs off their properties without bringing along a scoop or bag to collect waste. The new ordinance requires owners to clean up after their pets in public spaces or face fines up to \$250.

The City Council began considering stricter regulations on dogs after people living in a Chain Lake neighborhood demanded the city do something about dogs involved in several incidents.

Monroe, like most area cities, uses a two-strike approach when dogs become aggressive. Dogs earn the label of potentially dangerous if they bite or act aggressively once. If a second incident happens, the dogs are registered as dangerous.

The council considered a proposal that called for a dozen breeds to skip that first warning. But that proved unpopular with many dog owners.

Chain Lake resident Christine Baker, whose dog was attacked by her neighbor's dogs, said she and her husband understand why other dog owners didn't like breed-specific language. They just wanted the city to do something to prevent future attacks.

"As far as we're concerned, we are happy," she said. "Our concerns were heard and the city and the police department stepped up to do what they could. We'll see if the changes they've made will be enough."

Regardless, they probably will be enough -- at least for their neighborhood. It appears the neighbors with the problem pit bulls have moved.

Ruth said the city likely won't address dog issues until after the New Year. Other communities have found ways to curb biting dogs, City Councilman Tony Balk said. The city of Calgary, Alberta, for instance, reduced bite complaints by half by taking a number of strict measures, including tough leash laws, charging higher registration fees for dogs that aren't neutered and not allowing people convicted of dog fighting or drug crimes to own dogs, he said.

Reporter Debra Smith: 425-339-3197 or [dsmith@heraldnet.com](mailto:dsmith@heraldnet.com).  
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