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News

WYANDOTTE: City tightens animal controls

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By Jim Kasuba

WYANDOTTE — Pit bull owners can rest easier.

The city has reconsidered the idea of banning the breed.

However, City Council members are in the process of approving a new ordinance that deals with dangerous dogs of all breeds.

Several months ago, pit bull owners got wind that the council was considering an outright ban of their favorite breed of dog. However, such a measure was never brought to the table.

Instead, the council asked City Attorney William Look to research the issue further and to come back with something that would address city leaders' concerns, but that would not target a single breed of dog.

Look said the ordinance, for which a first reading was approved Monday, is neutral as to dog breed, but does focus on behavior. The ordinance is concerned with two classifications of dogs: dangerous and potentially dangerous.

"This ordinance was drafted after review of the existing state law, city of Farmington Hills ordinance, information packet submitted from the American Kennel Club, and the model dangerous dog legislation from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments," Look said.

Here's how it will work. If the animal control officer receives a complaint concerning a dangerous dog and he determines the dog to be dangerous, a recommendation is provided to the city prosecutor.

The prosecutor will then file a summons and complaint with the court. The dangerous dog must be surrendered to a proper dog-control authority at the owner's expense until a court determination is made.

"This is an adoption of the current state law in Michigan," Look said. "The court can order the dog destroyed or require the owner to take certain precautionary steps to protect the public."

If a complaint is filed with the city and the animal control officer deems the dog to be potentially dangerous, a citation is issued and the court makes the final determination.

If the court agrees the dog is potentially dangerous, the dog must be registered with the city, a sign must be posted on the owner's property, and the dog must be maintained in a proper and secure enclosure.

One resident questioned the council about what situations this new law would cover, or how it differs from what is currently in

the ordinance books.

Mayor James DeSana said the major change is that this law gives the city the authority to declare a dog to be dangerous, and in certain cases even before it attacks a person.

DeSana said that in the past, one of the biggest problems has been dogs running loose. For the most part, the city would simply return the dog to the owner with an admonishment to keep it in the back yard.

Councilwoman Sheri Sutherby-Fricke said the new ordinance holds vicious dog owners more responsible than before, without picking one breed over another.

"I think it adds a greater level of clarity," Councilman Todd Browning said.

Resident Cindy Groff, who told council members she wished there had been more notice given about this ordinance, in the end said she didn't have a problem with it.

Groff and her husband, Don, own an English Staffordshire bull terrier and a pit bull terrier. She likes the idea that the ordinance is not breed specific.

"Any dog is a potentially dangerous dog," Cindy Groff said. "Aggression doesn't know any breeds."

In reviewing the ordinance, Groff said it appears that it gives owners of dogs accused of being vicious a chance to state their case and, if necessary, to correct the situation.

Don Groff said he believes that dogs are only as good as owners teach them to be.

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