

KANAWHA COUNTY

Friday September 18, 2009

South Charleston axes restrictions on certain dog breeds

by Ashley B. Craig
Daily Mail staff

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- South Charleston has watered down an ordinance that would have required the owners of certain canine breeds to register their pets, after officials said they received critical feedback from the public.

Mayor Frank Mullens said he had a change of heart about the proposal after getting several phone calls and e-mails from dog owners.

"I received a lot of information in the last few weeks that may have swayed me a little bit," Mullens said. "I thought about it more at home, and what about those people who have had these types of dogs that have been good, loving pets for 10 years, and now because of this legislation they have to slap a muzzle on them every time they take them for a walk?"

The ordinance that proposed earlier this month and passed by council on first reading called for owners of pit bulls, Rottweilers and Presa Canarios to be registered and given special red tags. When outside, those specific dogs would have to be kept in enclosures or muzzled and kept on short leashes, the initial ordinance said.

The city now has scrapped mention of any specific breeds, instead requiring owners of dogs deemed dangerous to comply with the rules. The ordinance classifies those dogs as ones that have bitten, attacked or injured a person or another pet while off their owner's property, or have been used for dog fighting.

The revised ordinance was sent back to council for a first reading and passed with opposition only from Council President Dayton Griffith.

Griffith said he considers pit bulls and Rottweilers to be dangerous dogs and that he fears having them in his own neighborhood.

"I'm not going to water this down," Griffith said of the ordinance. "I think pit bulls and Rottweilers should be spelled out."

Mullens said that despite the changes, the ordinance's intent is to hold the owners of dangerous dogs responsible for their dog's actions.

"If you have a dog who has bitten or attacked someone, this applies to you," he said. "If you have a friendly, loving dog, this doesn't affect you."

Councilman Jeff Means applauded the mayor for listening to feedback from concerned residents and then being willing to make changes.

Councilman Paul Neal also argued that pit bulls and other dogs that are raised properly do not pose a danger. Neal said he is concerned the registration fee of \$100 per year and the fines for noncompliance -- \$250 to \$500 per day -- are excessive.

Mullens said the cost will help the city enforce the policy.

"We've got to have some teeth in this ordinance," he said.

The ordinance will be up for second reading and a final vote at council's Oct. 1 meeting. A public hearing on the matter also will be held at that time.

Also Thursday, a crowd gathered at council chambers to honor Leon Williams, who was recognized by the city for his 45 years of service.

Williams, who served several of those years as the assistant director of the city's public works department, recently retired. He performed many tasks, from driving a garbage truck to working on the city's construction crew.

"Every single day Leon Williams came to work he had the best interest of South Charlestonians in his heart," Mullens said.

The mayor recalled when, as a young public works director, he was faced with the task of picking an assistant.

He said Williams told him the day he got that job, "I'm gonna do the best job I can for you, but if you don't like the job I do, you just put me back in the truck and I'll be just fine."

Williams accepted a plaque from the city and got a standing ovation.

In other business, Public Works Director Gerald Burgy announced that the city's nine-hole Frisbee golf course will hold its grand opening Sept. 26 at Little Creek Park. The celebration starts at 10 a.m. at shelter 10 on top of the hill. The first 100 people to arrive will receive a free Frisbee disc.

Councilman Sonny Holstine also announced that the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation is holding an event at the South Charleston Memorial Ice Rink. Skaters can pay \$10 to skate from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. Saturday Oct. 3. All proceeds will go to the foundation.

Contact writer Ashley B. Craig at ashley.cr...@dailymail.com or 304-348-4850.

COMMENTS (13) ON "SOUTH CHARLESTON AXES RESTRICTIONS ON CERTAIN DOG BREEDS"

POST COMMENT

Posted By: **Problems:** (17 hours ago)

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1) Not enough humane officers to enforce any of these ordinances.

2) Humane officers can't act on any illegal act they do not observe. One pitt legally declared a 'dangerous dog' in court is required to be confined at all times; she has since 'gone after' one of my coworkers, and I have also seen her loose. Another pitt recently killed and partially ate a neighbor's cat. In both cases humane officers could do nothing because they didn't observe the dogs performing the illegal acts.

3) Intact males are [usually] the most dangerous. Owners of pitts [one of the deadliest bites] often refuse to neuter males, whether for the testosterone-induced aggression or the masculine appearance. [I see many male pitts on the West Side; few are neutered.] This greatly elevates the proportion of risk.

4) Owners of strong or aggressive breeds should be fined/jailed for using light leashes/collars or failure to control. Minors should be prohibited from owning these breeds due to immaturity.

Posted By: **WVState** (8:03pm 09-18-2009)

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Thank goodness South Charleston's mayor and council are more intelligent than Carper and the Kanawha County Commission.

Posted By: **Outraged mountie** (7:28pm 09-18-2009)

 Report Abuse

It's refreshing to see common sense and sanity return to South Charleston city hall. If a dog is "dangerous," it's because the owner has breed it that way. Don't put restrictions on dogs, of any breed, until they've proven to be a menace.

Posted By: **Get Educated** (6:24pm 09-18-2009)

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Oh yeah, I forgot - you're a moron who lacks reading comprehension skills, and you're stupid enough to believe if you insult someone enough, you'll win. Now, get going on that Pomeranian ban...I'm sure you'll go far with that...