

Procedures following dog attacks discussed at City Council meeting

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

Stray pets have been discussed at length at City Council meetings in the past year, including where to house them and how to control the population. But unfit owners and violent attacks were pushed into the spotlight at the Tuesday, Oct. 15 meeting.

Norma Paloucek attended the meeting, looking for answers about what is being done regarding a pitbull that attacked two pedestrians, one of which was her husband, Frank, earlier this month near SunSet View. From what Paloucek has gathered, she is worried the owners are not responsible as the dog has a history of getting loose.

Much of the discussion delved into procedures following the attack. The dog was returned to the owner for a 10-day quarantine at home. After a trip to the emergency room with her husband, Paloucek said she was told that if the dog showed no signs of rabies within 10 days that her husband would not have to have a rabies shot.

According to Paloucek, both the vet and the health department told her it was not their responsibility to check on the dog, citing that it is the duty of the police department.

Holyoke Police Chief Doug Bergstrom responded that in his 18 years he has never had a request from the health department to check on a dog and that this was the first he had heard of the vet expressing that belief as well.

“I just feel someone other than the owner should be saying what the condition of that dog is,” Paloucek expressed.

While one of Holyoke’s officers had checked on the condition of the dog, noting that it appeared fine, Bergstrom also acknowledged a problem with the police checking on the animal. The owners do not have to let the officers in their home to check on the dog.

Council member David Churchwell also questioned if police officers had the training to be qualified to determine the animal’s condition. Bergstrom explained that they basically only check

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to see if the animal is alive and that for a thorough check the animal would need to visit a vet.

Bergstrom explained that the health department gave the owners 14 days from the end of the quarantine to get the dog vaccinated, and the police department will follow through on checking to make sure the dog has received shots and has its city tags. If the owners have not completed this in the time allotted to them, Bergstrom said they will be written up for failure to license the dog.

Jerry Banaka, who attended the meeting alongside Paloucek, wondered why the dog had not been put down considering the severity of the attack. Frank Paloucek has been to the doctor almost every day since the Oct. 1 attack and has visited a wound clinic as well.

Banaka explained that years ago his son had been bitten by a dog, and the police at that time gave him the option of having the dog put down because the bite drew blood. Paloucek and Banaka both expressed their belief that stricter laws need to be put in place to prevent similar accidents, especially from dogs who are identified as violent offenders.

If the dog were to get loose again, Bergstrom explained that the most he can do is issue a dog-at-large fine. Bergstrom has no authority to kill the dog, stating that it is up to the courts to make that decision.

The owners were written up for unlawful ownership of a dangerous dog. It is now up to the district attorney whether to prosecute or not.

When Paloucek asked if the owners are responsible for the medical bills her husband has racked up, Bergstrom commented that the D.A. could ask for restitution or she may be able to take the case to civil court, but he was unsure of all the options.

Banaka also asked if the city has any liability if the dog were to attack another person because they were aware of the situation. City Attorney Al Wall commented that he was unable to answer the question because he was unfamiliar with the details of the case.

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