

Need for animal shelter examined as loose dog problems persist in town

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

With a pair of recent dog attacks and limited legal options to deal with negligent dog owners, the importance of an animal shelter once again returned to the spotlight at the Tuesday, Dec. 3 Holyoke City Council meeting.

A letter from Jan Stoddard fueled the discussion as loose dogs have become a public concern. The letter urged the city to develop stricter laws to deal with loose dogs before biting incidents occur.

Holyoke Police Chief Doug Bergstrom noted that the current procedure for handling dog-at-large incidents is a warning for the owner on the first occurrence, a \$50 fine on the second, a \$75 fine on the third and the owner being sent to court on the fourth.

Mayor Orville Tonsing asked if it was possible to raise the fees, but city attorney All Wall said an ordinance provides procedures for picking up dogs at large, not for setting a fee schedule.

Board members noted that there is currently no distinction in the law between dogs at large and vicious dogs.

“So the key here is to have a dog pound,” council member Scott Murray stated. “I feel like we should start doing something with these vicious dog bites at least. It just blows my mind that we don’t have anything stronger for enforcement laws.”

Constructing an animal shelter within a city pole shed was discussed in the spring, but the high winds from the April storm demolished the building.

Constructing an animal shelter would be an expensive task, as pointed out by multiple council members at the meeting. Other town procedures for shelters, as well as requirements and regulations regarding a housing unit were also discussed.

Need for animal shelter examined as loose dog problems persist in town

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

It would also be expensive to feed dogs taken in and those who are not adopted out would be the responsibility of the city. A no-kill shelter would likely be a financial burden as dogs, especially those with a violent past, would be hard to find families for and could be the city's responsibility for a lengthy time.

"We're all pretty much in agreement that something needs to be done," Tonsing said.

The dog responsible for multiple attacks in October has since been returned to its former owner in Nebraska. The owner entered a plea of guilty to ownership of a dangerous dog and to dog-at-large charges. Misdemeanor fines for the owner have been lifted with conditions of probation stating that the dog is not allowed back in Colorado and that restitution is paid in full.

MMH seeks options for tower height restrictions

Melissa Memorial Hospital administrator John Ayoub attended Tuesday's meeting to discuss possible options regarding tower height restrictions set forth in an ordinance passed by council members in June.

The ordinance limited towers constructed within city limits to be no taller than 50 feet.

A proposed 80-foot tower by Viera Wireless on the northeast corner of the hospital's property, along Evans Avenue and Gordon Street, would allow MMH to run fiber connection from the building to the tower. This would give MMH the ability to access a wireless backup system if an Internet outage were to occur.

Ayoub wanted to make clear that he was attending the meeting on behalf of MMH and was not representing Viera Wireless or any other business.

Need for animal shelter examined as loose dog problems persist in town

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

With MMH going live with the electronic medical records in September 2012, MMH has examined outlets in which to ensure those records are easily accessible.

Ayoub noted that while Internet outages are rare (he estimated only a few in the past year and a half), the hospital relies on the Internet to access patient information. As the hospital moves further away from backup paper records, maintaining a secure Internet source is crucial.

When considering the tower location, Ayoub said being a good neighbor was a priority for the hospital. The location ensures that trenching through residential property would not be necessary to connect to the tower, and the tower would not lie directly next to anyone's house. It also would not interfere with the airport or MMH helipad and would be the same height as the nearby baseball field lights.

At this point, Ayoub stated he wasn't sure if a 50-foot tower would work. With the limits, more towers will be needed for full coverage, and the position of the towers may not be as ideal for neighbors.

Mayor Tonsing informed Ayoub that council members will have to research the situation more before making a decision but stated that he believes allowing towers to be placed around town with no restrictions would be a major disaster.

Annual appropriations ordinance approved

Council members approved the final reading of the annual appropriations ordinance for 2014. Appropriations are necessary to defray expenses and liabilities for the city.

Need for animal shelter examined as loose dog problems persist in town

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

Board members agreed to allow city clerk/treasurer Kathy Olofson to certify the mill levy at 21.8 mills (21.2 General, .6 for Volunteer Fire) and to adjust the revenue in the 2014 budget to reflect the assessor's final valuation of \$14,764,137.

Total appropriations for the budget is \$7,695,179. The general and utility fund take up the largest percentage of the budget at \$3,871,256 and \$3,499,085 respectively.

Other appropriations are as follows:

Sale of Heginbotham Land \$150

Equipment Replacement \$242,040

Library Land \$500

Cemetery Perpetual Care \$3,670

Fire Pension \$19,675

Massman Memorial \$100

Contingency \$0

Cemetery White/Leeper Memorial \$65

Need for animal shelter examined as loose dog problems persist in town

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

Conservation Trust \$54,078

LeBlanc Estate \$4,560

Capital Reserve \$0

Spindler Library \$0

Officials report

City superintendent Mark Brown reported that there had been one power outage since the Tuesday, Nov. 19 meeting. It occurred along South Baxter Avenue on Thursday, Nov. 28 and was caused by a squirrel on the transformer.

When Wall brought up floodplain regulations, Brown stated that if the city were to adopt the regulations, he believes an engineer needs to be hired to oversee the process.

Brown noted that the process is going to be difficult as much of the city falls within the 100-year floodplain. He added that several hundred people fall in the floodplain by just a few inches and may actually be 1,000 feet from the creek.

Bergstrom reported that from Nov. 14-26, the Holyoke Police Department had generated 51 calls for service, made one arrest, gave out one citation, wrote two reports and issued several warnings.

Need for animal shelter examined as loose dog problems persist in town

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

Other business

In other business Dec. 3, the council:

—approved to offer two individual vacation days as door prizes for employees at the Christmas party.

Holyoke Enterprise December 12, 2013