

New Austin animal ordinance sets care and conduct standards for pet owners

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A new animal ordinance that specifically addresses the care of and conduct toward domesticated animals went into effect in the City of Austin on January 1.

City Council members have been discussing the need for a more strict code of conduct and care of such animals such as cats and dogs since a U.S. Postal Service mail carrier was attacked by a dog about 18 months ago. The dog had gotten loose from a chain in its owner's back yard and attacked the carrier as she walked onto the property.

The carrier has since recovered and has returned to work.

The new ordinance emphasizes the responsibilities of owners of domesticated animals within the corporate limits of the city.

Humane treatment of animals covers providing "...proper food, water, shelter (where appropriate) and reasonable care to prevent suffering," according to the new document.

The injury or killing of domesticated animals is also covered, including a defense of those actions by a person.

The term "dangerous dog" is defined by the new law with the clause that "...Any animal shall not be deemed dangerous solely because it bites, attacks or menaces..." based on certain reasons listed.

The ordinance also defines enclosures used for dogs as well as restraint for canines as well as specifically for a "dangerous dog."

The law requires owners to keep their dogs "under restraint" at all times and then goes on to cite the duties of responsible owners, including duties required while the animal is unattended.

It also covers additional precautions to be taken by owners of dogs deemed to be dangerous. For example, the law requires persons owning dangerous dogs to post a sign on the property warning that such an animal is on the premises. The sign must be visible and capable of being read from a public highway.

Should his animal attack another animal or a person or be "on the loose," the owner is required to immediately notify the Scott County Animal Shelter.

Violations of the ordinance will be handled through issuance of citations to the animal's owner. The dog may be seized. If, within seven days after the seizure, the owner cannot provide proof that the dog will be kept restrained or confined in compliance with the ordinance or fails to reclaim it from the animal shelter, the animal will be euthanized.

Quarantining of dogs, the definition of a nuisance and other terms are also part of the new law. Penalties are also listed for violations. Fines shall not exceed \$500 plus costs. Costs can include impoundment and euthanization expenses.

Persons wishing to look at or obtain a copy of the new ordinance may visit Austin City Hall between the hours of 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday, holidays excepted.