



**MINUTES  
PUBLIC SERVICES & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE  
SEPTEMBER 7, 2023  
5:00PM**

**Members Present:** Dan Ruff (Chair), Tim Roseborough, Peggy Swearingen

**Others Present:** Laura Johnson (Interim Administrator), Synithia Williams (Deputy County Administrator), Bob Innis (Director Animal Control), Lt. Chris Childers (Sheriff's Office), Carter Thompson (Community Development Director), Dr. Kimberly Roberts (Clerk to Council)

**I. Call To Order**

Mr. Ruff called the meeting to order at 5:00pm.

**II. Invocation**

Invocation led by Councilwoman Swearingen.

**III. Approval of Agenda**

Motion made by Councilwoman Swearingen, seconded by Councilman Ruff to approve the agenda. ***The motion carried 2-0.***

**Mr. Roseborough entered the meeting at 5:16pm.**

**IV. Discussion of Proposed Changes to Animal Ordinance**

Mrs. Johnson said in recent weeks, they had a few instances with animals that caused them to look more closely at breeders. (She thanked those that turned in recommendations). She said she and Director Innis came up with some recommendations regarding breeders and wanted their feedback. The first recommendation was certification showing the dog was a pure bred from a reputable organization. Second, the breeder must provide a vet report that the dog was healthy for breeding. Third, a County registration fee paid by the owner and lastly, the owner had to be a registered kennel breeder. Mrs. Swearingen asked her to start with the first recommendation. Mrs. Johnson said it was certification showing the dog was a pure bred from a reputable organization and Mrs. Swearingen said yes. Mrs. Johnson said the second one pertained to proof that the animal was healthy for breeding. Mr. Ruff asked if that would be annually and she said yes – he said ok. The third was the implementation of a County registration fee – they currently did not have one. Mrs. Swearingen asked how much. Mrs. Johnson said it could be a one-time

fee or an annual fee. Mr. Innis said he thought it should be a one-time fee because dogs could not breed forever. Mrs. Swearingen suggested \$150.00 annually. Lt. Childers asked if it would be specifically for breeders recognized as breeders. He said he had a hunting lab – if he wanted to get puppies from it, would he be recognized as a breeder. Mrs. Johnson recalled three incidents – one where they had sufficient documentation but the current ordinance did not have any of the proposed provisions in place to address breeders so in that scenario, the animal would be spayed or neutered. Mrs. Swearingen said that was only if the dog was picked up by Animal Control. Lt. Childers asked if the dog was considered a hunting dog, would it be exempt from being spayed or neutered. Mrs. Johnson said one of the exceptions in the ordinance was that hunting dogs were exempt with a provision that they were registered with DNR (Department of Natural Resources). Mrs. Swearingen said it was in there but there was no such thing as a dog being registered with DNR. Lt. Childers said he was familiar with the documentation requiring a dog be registered as a hunting dog but there was no state law or law with DNR that said he had to register his dog as a hunting dog with the state of South Carolina. He said the only requirement was proof that the owner was a licensed hunter. He was told by DNR that if he had a kennel, and he used it as a guide service and he was paid to take someone out to run deer with his dogs he would have to register those dogs as a part of that kennel because he made a profit from it. He said if a person hunted game animals, a license was required but all dogs did not hunt game animals. Mrs. Johnson asked if that was an “out” for those who could easily say their dogs were used for hunting – how could they streamline it. Mrs. Swearingen referenced page 11 of the Animal Ordinance which stated – “has a valid South Carolina hunting license provided however if such dog is not properly registered with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources..”. She said there was no such thing and that needed to come out and be replaced with verbiage that stated the dog had to be registered in Fairfield County. Lt. Childers asked if they knew how many people in the County that hunted their dogs. He wanted to know who they were going to hire to mandate that. In regards to the concern about what dogs were used for hunting, he said Chihuahuas and Terriers were used to hunt rodents so who were they to say that a person’s dog was not a hunting dog. Mrs. Johnson said that was her point to not leave it open-ended. Mrs. Swearingen said if they were truly hunting dogs, the owner would register them.

Mr. Innis said the big issue in the County was pit bulls/pit mixes – not hunting dogs. People bred them constantly and they did not vaccinate them or take them for vet checks. He thought hunting dogs should be microchipped and registered but that was not the problem. They needed

to stop the overbreeding/overpopulation of dogs and the great expense it costs the taxpayers by back street pit bull breeders.

Mr. Ruff asked if he looked at other counties with similar problems. Mr. Innis said Lexington County was at the first reading of an ordinance stating dogs kept in backyards must be fixed - all dogs must be microchipped. It was a state wide issue that shelters were overcrowded. Pit bull breeding was a problem and it needed to stop.

Mrs. Johnson acknowledged Mr. Roseborough entering the meeting and gave a brief overview of the things that discussed thus far.

Mrs. Swearingen suggested all hunting dogs be registered, regardless of the type of game they hunt, with a \$150 annual fee and no spade or neutering.

Mr. Roseborough said at the last meeting, Lt. Childers said it was not feasible to register breeding dogs. Lt. Childers said those who claimed to be breeders (it was their only source of income) needed to be regulated in some way. He asked if he would have to register as a breeder if he decided to breed his aged lab to get an offspring or would the recommendation be for those who breed as their only source of income. He felt only those who bred as their only source of income should have to register.

Mrs. Swearingen said some people would not admit to making money from breeding.

Mr. Ruff said if someone registered their dog and only wanted to breed once, if the dog got out and was picked up it would not be neutered and the person would have one week to claim the dog. He said if the person cared enough about the dog, he would pay the \$150 fee.

Mr. Roseborough said he thought they were just going to charge a fee if a dog was caught - \$50 for the first time and the fee would continue to increase until a predetermined amount. Mrs. Johnson said they had a first-time offense of \$25 and the second offense was \$50 but even with the first offense, they were not exempt from being spade or neutered.

Mr. Roseborough said he thought they should be exempt from being spade or neutered, especially if the owner did not want it. Mrs.

Swearingen said they needed to be kept properly to avoid getting loose.

Mr. Roseborough gave a recent example of a breeder's dog getting loose and being caught and was spade/neutered.

Mr. Innis said that was the purpose of recommending registration for true breeders. Mr. Roseborough said he thought spade/neutering was uncalled for. Mr. Innis said there was an overpopulation of animals throughout the county and state. People did not take care of the animals, 99% of them were pit bulls/pit mixes and they did not have enough space to house them.

Mrs. Johnson said Mr. Innis told her earlier in the week that when a female was impregnated, the owner would bring the litter to the shelter and it was contributing to the overpopulation. She asked if they could agree on the four recommendations made earlier – certification, vet report, registration fee and owner being a registered kennel breeder. Mr. Ruff and Mrs. Swearingen agreed – Mr. Roseborough disagreed. He recommended the owner be fined if his dog was picked up, not be spade/neutered and released.

Mr. Innis said when people were told the fine, they would not pay and leave their animal at the shelter – that idea would make the situation worse.

Lt. Childers said they recently had a hurricane. In a situation like that, a tree falls and knocks down a fence and the dog gets out. The dog gets picked up (first offense) and the owner is told because he is not a registered kennel breeder and it was not a hunting dog it has to be spade/neutered. Another scenario – the meter reader comes into a yard and did not shut the gate and the dog gets out. He asked what the recourse would be for the people to plead their case in situations that were not caused by them. He said every ordinance passed by Council became law. Those like Mr. Innis and himself enforced those laws. After the enforcement of the laws, did they have the authority to judge guilt or would they be able to go before a judge to plead their case. He thought that would be an issue – them being the lawmaker, law enforcer and the prosecutor. Mrs. Johnson agreed. She said due to the current ordinance, if a dog was picked up for any reason, the Animal Control department would be guided by that ordinance. It had not been revised since 2020 and there had been no complaints about the ordinance until they started talking about revising it. She said their recommendations had to go before full Council for approval. If a breeding dog was caught the next day, the current ordinance would have to be enforced – no matter the circumstances or documentation.

Mrs. Swearingen referenced registration for breeding dogs and said there was no registration requirements for non-breeding dogs. Therefore, there should be a \$100 fine for the first offense and on the third they should be spade/neutered. Mrs. Johnson said Mr. Innis pointed out that with the current fine of \$25 people were choosing to leave their dogs at the shelter. Mrs. Swearingen suggested leaving the fine at \$25 and at the second offense then spade/neuter.

Lt. Childers agreed that Mr. Innis should not be the judge – it should be decided by the courts.

Mrs. Johnson said they looked at ordinances in several other counties that automatically said spade/neuter. If the Council decided that every case needed to go to court, there would still not be enough room for all of the

animals and the longer the animal stayed at the shelter the cost increased for the owner. They could not know how long it would take a magistrate to decide a case. They already had instances where upset citizens cursed out/threatened the shelter staff. They were considering installing cameras.

Mr. Roseborough said he was talking about responsible dog owners – those people would pay the fee to get their dogs back or get them spade/neutered. He asked if there was a way to distinguish between the responsible and non-responsible owners.

Mrs. Swearingen said the responsible owners could have their dogs registered and Mr. Roseborough said that was just another tax on animal owners. She said if they cared about their dogs, they would pay to register them to ensure that they did not get spade/neutered.

Mr. Ruff said it was like an insurance protection plan – pay \$150/year to ensure that if your dog (any dog) was picked up it would not be spade/neutered.

Lt. Childers asked how many positions would be created to register the dogs in the county and Mr. Ruff said he did not see where additional positions would be needed.

Mr. Innis said the problem in the county was pit bull/pit mixes. The backstreet breeders did not care about the dogs and would not pay to register them. They did not pick up enough hunting dogs to be concerned about them. He had a conversation with the Council four years ago and no one wanted to do anything about it then and the problem had gotten worse and no one seemed to have any answers.

Mr. Roseborough asked how many days they kept an animal before they euthanized it and Mr. Innis said there was not a set number of days. He said they were not going to euthanize their way out of the problem because they had too many dogs. He could euthanize every dog in the shelter and by the following week, it would be full again due to backstreet breeders. The taxpayers were paying for it.

Mr. Ruff asked Mr. Innis his solution and he said he thought the county should have a registration process (not to make money) so true registered breeders could do so.

Mrs. Johnson asked if the recommendation was a \$150 registration fee for every animal and Mr. Ruff said yes. She said she thought that would be very taxing on the citizens and Mr. Innis agreed. They were already short-staffed – some positions had been opened for months. They were struggling with the amount of animals they picked up. They would not solve the problem overnight but they needed to bring in laws that would decrease backstreet breeding. He thought they needed registration - maybe not for every animal but they still needed to meet the requirements. When asked his recommendation by Mr. Ruff, Mr. Innis said

he did not think they should change the ordinance in regards to fixing animals and other animals (such as hunting dogs) should be registered so if they were picked up they would not be fixed.

Mr. Roseborough said some owners had more than one hunting dog and in that case, he asked would they be required to register each dog individually. Lt. Childers agreed and asked would the owner be required to register himself (to cover all of his dogs) or would he have to register each dog at \$150/each. Mrs. Johnson said her understanding was the registration would be for the owner. Mr. Innis said it should be one fee and the owner could register all of his dogs with proof of registration/shot (rabies) records. Dogs could be added to the owner's registration with the same proof with no additional fee.

Mrs. Swearingen said they were only talking about registering hunting dogs but they needed to register all dogs. Mrs. Johnson said Mr. Innis did not have the man power to handle that.

Mrs. Johnson asked if the committee agreed with the items discussed regarding breeders – certification/proof of dog being pure bred, vet report, registration fee of \$150 annually, and owner was a registered kennel breeder. They also recommended that show dogs be registered to include the \$150 fee. She verified Mr. Roseborough's recommendation was a \$100 fine at the first offense, a \$150 fine at the second offense and spade/neutered at the third offense.

Lt. Childers said they lived in one of the poorest counties in the state.

Mrs. Johnson said Mr. Innis was trying to point out that with fines being that high, even if the owner wanted their animal back, they might not be able to afford to do so but currently, they were paying the \$25 fine.

Currently, the first offense was a \$25 fine and the animal was spade/neutered.

Mr. Roseborough asked if it could be changed to first offense \$25 with spade/neutering happening at the third offense. Mr. Innis said he thought the county would be moving backwards – it would not solve the problem of overbreeding. He said they euthanized 7-8 dogs per month.

Lt. Childers said they needed to allow for acts of God at the first offense.

Mr. Ruff said he agreed with the \$150 registration fee. They could not cover acts of God – if the owner cared enough about the dog, they would pay to register it.

Mrs. Johnson said they would table the discussion and she encouraged them to be ready to wrap things up at the next meeting and to have recommendations to forward to full Council. She reminded them that the current ordinance would remain in place until amended – meaning if a breeder dog was picked up, it would be spade/neutered.

**V. Short-Term Rental Discussion**

Mrs. Williams said they would be coming back to the committee with a draft related to short-term rentals. They were not looking at a wholesale ban. They looked at what other cities/counties had done and the recommendations from the South Carolina Association of Counties and they focused more on regulating short-term rentals rather than bans. They were looking to require owner registration, a local representative, reliance on the noise/nuisance ordinances, the timeframe guests could use the short-term rental and the number of people that could occupy at one time. Homeowner's Associations (HOA's) could ban them in their covenants but the County did not enforce HOA covenants.

Ms. Thompson said the rentals were there – there a few online. She felt they needed to be regulated. They needed to be registered for a business license and pay hospitality taxes. They were beneficial in that they could bring people into the county that may not have visited otherwise. They may be looking to buy property. Most municipalities addressed short-term rentals from a reactionary point. Some of her recommendations were those renting for 30 days or less, a local representative for contact (management company or individual) and they would have to register. Also, the Sheriff's Office would need to be involved regarding the noise/nuisance ordinance.

Mrs. Johnson said they were doing preliminary work on an ordinance and asked the committee to think about items they (and the citizens) would want included. They definitely needed a local representative to take responsibility for any issues.

Ms. Thompson said they might want to consider a system to fine offenses (amount of the fine, how many offenses, etc.)

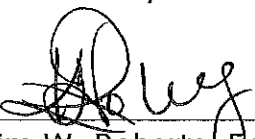
Mr. Ruff asked Ms. Thompson to email her recommendations to them and she agreed. She said it could be good for the county – someone may visit and see a property he may want to rehabilitate for business.


Mrs. Johnson said they were finished unless the committee had additional questions for Mrs. Williams or Ms. Thompson.

Mr. Ruff thanked the Committee and Administration for attending the meeting.

**VI. ADJOURN**

At 6:19pm, Councilman Roseborough made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councilwoman Swearingen. ***The motion carried 3-0.***

  
Kim W. Roberts, Ed. D.  
Clerk to Council

  
Doug Pauley  
Chairman