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Proposal Focuses On Owner Behavior, Not Dog Breed

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Laurie Green, director of the Cookeville/Putnam County Animal Shelter

COOKEVILLE, Tenn. - A new proposed ordinance in Putnam County would shift the blame for dangerous dogs from the animal to its owner.

Laurie Green, director of the Cookeville/Putnam County Animal Shelter, said the ordinance would regulate the ownership of not only pit bulls, but any dog that might bite someone.

Green likens it to drunk driving. It doesn't matter whether someone drinks liquor or wine, they are still dangerous on the road if they decide to get behind the wheel.



Carolyn Sheets, a dog owner who agrees with the proposed ordinance

So a dangerous dog is a dangerous dog whether it's a pit bull or a black Labrador retriever.

"Not vicious dogs, they're not man-eating dogs," Green said, referring to some dogs at the shelter because they broke loose and threatened other animals and humans. "They're basically good dogs whose owners have made critical errors."

If the new dangerous dog ordinance becomes law, several dogs would be designated potentially dangerous. Some animals may receive an irrevocable designation.



John Lyon, a dog owner who agrees with the proposed ordinance.

"Your non pet owning neighbor has the same rights as you do and they should be able to walk freely without concern," Green said.

It's a law to punish and fine owners not dogs and dog lovers seem to embrace the idea.

"I can't leave her outside by herself because of the big dogs," said Carolyn Sheets, cradling her dachshund in one arm.



Green with Polly, a Great Pyrenees that is a repeat offender

"If they can't control their dog then they shouldn't have a dog," said John Lyon. "We bring our dog to obedience class just for that purpose."

Putnam County, in particular, has had dozens of dog bite victims in recent years and not just from pit bulls.

"Any dog can bite. Any dog can be put in a position it should not be put into and therefore became a danger to another animal or another person," Green said.

It's an ordinance that is long overdue, Green said, to keep dogs such as Polly, a Great Pyrenees at the shelter, just as sweet as she looks. This is Polly's fifth stay at the shelter because she's broken loose and threatened other dogs.

"But if you don't do it responsibly, if your dogs hurts someone, severely attacks or kills someone, you're going to answer to the ordinance and we're going to come down on you," Green said,

If an owner's dog is designated potentially dangerous and they correct the problem within two years the dog will be taken off the dangerous list. Owners may be able to do that by taking the dog to obedience training or by building a fence.

The proposed ordinance is still being reworked. Afterwards, Green will take it to the county or to the Cookeville City Council for approval.



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