

Dog involved in attack to be evaluated

By JODY RECORD

Union Leader Correspondent

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PORTSMOUTH — A dog that attacked a man whose efforts to get free included stabbing the animal and hitting him with a shovel will be removed from his home and evaluated by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to determine if he is vicious.

The measure comes on the recommendation of the city's animal control officer who, during a hearing at the Portsmouth Police Department yesterday, detailed the dog's history of running loose and creating a public nuisance prior to the November incident.

Owner Tina Hickman of Islington Street admitted Bear, her 120-pound Newfoundland, often gets out of her fenced yard along with Sport, a shepherd mix. But neither dog is vicious, she said, and she doesn't want to chain them.

The man who was attacked, Henry Perron, displayed scars on his right arm from where Bear bit him and described the horrific ordeal to members of the hearing board, which included Police Chief Michael Magnant, veterinarian Robin Zuckerman of Emergency Veterinarian Clinic, and Mimi Clark. City attorney Robert Sullivan and Animal Control Officer Patti Tate also were on hand.

On Nov. 7, Perron was in his home at the intersection of Swett and McClintock avenues when he heard his young daughters screaming. He went out to see Bear grab his dog, Beau, by the neck. Perron tried to get the dogs apart and ended up with both dogs on top of him.

"I couldn't move Bear's jaws at all," Perron said of the grip the big dog had on his smaller one. "My two daughters were screaming, running in and out of the house. The only thing I wanted to do was kill this dog."

Afraid Bear would harm his daughters, Perron was able to work his knife out of his pocket. He says he stabbed the dog five or six times before Bear snapped at him, releasing the little dog. With Bear still pinning him down, Perron tried to break the animal's neck over a nearby two-by-four. When that didn't work, he reached for a shovel and hit the dog.

At that point, Perron had been bitten on the hand five times. His jacket was torn and he had blood blisters on his forearm from where the dog had his arm in his teeth. Perron's daughter was also hurt on the hand.

When Bear took off down the street, Perron followed, worried he wouldn't know if he was at risk of getting rabies unless he found out where the dog's owner lived. As he chased the dog, he encountered an elderly neighbor walking her poodle.

Perron yelled for her to pick up her dog. When Bear bound toward the woman, Perron ran up and hit him with the shovel. The dog ran off.

"I had five bite marks on my hands. He bit through my jacket; he bit my forearm," Perron said. "I have reoccurring dreams about attacking dogs and I can't get to my kids. . . . I thought my life was in danger. I thought I would be killed in front of my daughters."

Perron argued it's unsafe to have a 120-pound dog running around when he could "take a 200-pound man and toss him around like he weighed 40 pounds." He said that, as a parent, he continually thinks of the "what ifs."

"If I had already left, if this had happened 10 minutes later, I would have come home to two dead dogs and two children mauled or killed," Perron said. "It's like a 357 being left on the table."

While Hickman conceded the dogs should not have been running loose, she doesn't believe they are a threat to anyone. She brought with her letters of support from people whom she said have frequent contact with Bear and Sport and do not worry about getting hurt.

"The whole thing about the dogs being vicious, I can't grasp the concept," Hickman said. "The idea they have to

be taken away, have to be put down, I think is outrageous. . . . They are not aggressive dogs. Out of their element, I don't know what they'll do."

Chief Magnant said, "We already have some idea what they will do. They already attacked this man and his daughter."

When the chief asked Hickman if she had any idea how to prevent the dogs from escaping, she said, "I'm not going to lose my dog. I don't feel I have to." She then said she could keep them in a kennel on her property that she hasn't used in two years.

-RT>Hickman did say she was sorry for what happened and that hearing Perron describe it "sounded terrible."

Shortly after the hearing ended, attorney Sullivan said it had been decided that Bear would be removed from Hickman's care and evaluated to see if he is vicious according to city ordinances.

"She has to surrender the dog to the SPCA," Sullivan said. "They will evaluate him and then a final determination will be made."

Reached at her home later, Hickman said she would talk with her children's father and "decide where to go from here," adding, "I guess I have no choice but to surrender him. I don't know, I'm waiting to see what we're going to do."

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