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Selectmen agree to evaluate dog

Sunny's second attack in a month prompts action

By Paula J. Owen CORRESPONDENT

PRINCETON— The Board of Selectmen voted to spare 1-year-old Alaskan malamute Sunny until a behavioral evaluation is done after the dog's second attack in less than a month.

The dog's owner, Leo Montagna of 6 Bigelow Road, kept repeating to selectmen during a hearing last night that he can and would control his dog.

But selectmen said they needed more than his word after the dog attacked neighbor Alwin J. Haase of 40 Bigelow Road on Nov. 3.

The animal inspector had quarantined Sunny for 10 days after an incident Oct. 30 at Mr. Montagna's business, Lee Plastics in Sterling.

Mr. Montagna said he brought Sunny with him to work every day since he was a puppy and had never had a problem with him until the day he bit one of his employees on both hands.

Nov. 3 was the first day Sunny had been home alone since Mr. Montagna got him, he said, and added that he thought quarantined meant restrained on his property. Princeton does not have a leash law, but dogs must be controlled by their owners.

Mr. Montagna said he did not know how Sunny escaped his tie-out — the clasp was not broken — and attacked Mr. Haase from behind, pushing him down, biting his hands and arms and leaving scratches on his back.

Mr. Haase said he was able to fight off the 95-pound dog and get into his truck to escape. He required medical treatment and is still experiencing numbness in his left arm, he said.

Mr. Haase, 59, said he is a retired captain from the Department of Correction in Shirley and has worked with dogs his entire career.

"What scared me is that it was totally unprovoked," Mr. Haase said. "I had nothing in my hands. I didn't move on the dog."

"I don't want to see the dog euthanized," he added. "That is not why I am here. I need to have something ironclad to make sure there is not a repeat."

Roger B. Boilard of 36 Bigelow Road said he was concerned about the safety of his 7-year-old grandson and other children on the street.

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However, Michelle M. Frasier, a teacher who lives on Wheeler Road, said she grew up around Alaskan malamutes and feels they are dominant dogs, but not vicious.

She said she was afraid of speaking in favor of taking other actions instead of euthanizing Sunny because she felt she would "suffer the wrath from people on Bigelow Road," but she said she was scared of selectmen having the authority to make that kind of a "jump" decision without consulting an expert on animal behavior.

Mrs. Frazier has two mixed-breed dogs, and Sunny frequently visits them on his walks.

"I would walk up to Sunny in a heartbeat with a child," she said.

"If the dog did something, something caused it to do it," she said. "I know if I got hit by a car because somebody was driving too fast, they would get a second chance. At least give him a chance to put him in a kennel."

Mr. Montagna said he has lived on Bigelow Road for 26 years and raised two other dogs of the same breed and never had any problems.

"I don't believe he is a vicious dog," he said. "He's been with other people on weekends. I am sorry it happened, and I will do everything I can to keep it from happening again. It's the last thing in the world I wanted. He was overexuberant, and I have to train him a lot better."

He said he would have a pen up in a week.

Selectmen said they were not satisfied that would ensure the safety of people in the neighborhood.

Sunny had escaped once during quarantine and then another time after the attack on Mr. Haase, they said.

They gave Mr. Montagna 24 hours to report to the animal control officer that Sunny is in a safe, secure area and that he has made an appointment with a certified animal behaviorist that will report on his temperament and "trainability." The dog hearing will be reconvened Dec. 8.

They encouraged Mr. Montagna to come up with an alternate plan should the behaviorist find that Sunny needs special training he is unable to provide and to consider calling the breeder he purchased Sunny from.

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