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Dog in Richland fatal attack won't be labeled dangerous

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The boxer-Labrador mix involved in a deadly dog fight in Richland will not be deemed dangerous.

A report prepared by Angela Zilar, Tri-City Animal Control director, and Amy Linderman, the animal control officer who investigated the incident, has been released to the Herald.

Zilar gave her report to the Richland city attorney more than a week ago so a third party could review her findings and investigation.

A miniature dachshund, Pumpkin, died en route to the veterinarian's office after the fight on New Year's Eve day. Pumpkin and at least one other dog, a boxer-Labrador mix named Jesse James, got into a fight that left both dog owners injured, Pumpkin dead and Jesse James with bite marks on his head.

The dog owners' stories about how the fight began differ.

Elinor Woehler, owner of Pumpkin, says she was attacked by the boxer-Labrador mix and a pit bull while she was walking her two miniature dachshunds.

Jim House, owner of the boxer-Labrador mix, a pit bull and another Labrador that were present during the fight, says Jesse James approached Pumpkin in a playful manner but engaged the smaller dog in a fight when the dachshund nipped at him.

Despite the discrepancies, both dog owners said Tuesday they're willing to move on, although Andrew Woehler, Elinor's husband, said the couple are considering legal action against House.

"There really isn't a next step for us," Andrew Woehler said. "The whole point that we wanted to bring up is that Richland should review its laws on dogs, on dangerous dogs."

He asked the Richland City Council earlier this month to review city policies concerning loose dogs and to consider establishing breed-specific regulations. Those would require owners of dog breeds considered "potentially dangerous" to follow more stringent rules regarding housing and dog control in public.

"We never really were out to have any dog owned by Mr. House labeled as dangerous," Andrew Woehler said. "We just wanted Mr. House to be a more responsible dog owner."

House, who was cited for having two of his dogs, including Jesse James and the Labrador, off leashes when the fight broke out, said the incident has caused him to rethink how he'll restrain his dogs in public.

"Yeah, I'll keep my dogs on the leash," he said. "I had two of my dogs off-leash, and I'll be more careful about it. ... I don't want anybody to think my dogs are dangerous."

According to the animal control report, neither Zilar nor Linderman found the boxer-Labrador to be dangerous.

"During the interview, Jesse's demeanor was very calm," Linderman wrote. "He never once growled, barked or showed any visible signs of aggression."

Zilar wrote, "I believe both dogs involved in the attack were off-leash, and upon encountering each other 'Pumpkin' bit 'Jesse' and a fight broke out. The injuries inflicted to both dogs are consistent with that finding. This would make both

bites inflicted by each dog a provoked attack and does not warrant a declaration."

Zilar wrote that she believed there were too many discrepancies "to prove that the dog named 'Jesse' meets the requirement of the code to declare dangerous."

The discrepancies she cited were differing accounts of whether the dachshunds were leashed and how many of House's dogs were involved in the fight. Woehler had maintained none of House's dogs were on leash.

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