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## **Bad dogs or just problem owners?**

By Nancy Cambria  
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### **LAKE SAINT LOUIS**

The Board of Aldermen has sharpened an ordinance dealing with vicious dogs and animal attacks in Lake Saint Louis.

The revised ordinance, approved by the board Monday night, defines a dangerous animal as any animal that "without justification, attacks a person or domestic animal causing physical injury or death or behaves in a manner that a reasonable person would believe poses an unjustified and imminent threat of serious injury or death."

Earlier this year, residents asked officials to examine the existing ordinance and consider restricting pit bull ownership in the city. In November, Sean Hughes of Oak Hill Drive told the board that his son, Austin, had survived a vicious pit bull attack when the family lived in another state. The child suffered skull fractures in two places, he said.

Police Chief Michael Force said Tuesday that his staff had researched the breed and others with the American Veterinary Association and concluded that the problem was not with the breed, but with irresponsible owners.

"To target a specific breed really isn't going to target the problem," Force said. "It's really an issue of holding pet owners accountable for their actions. They need to take reasonable care and be aware of the concerns of others."

The revised law requires complainants to sign a formal affidavit with police. It also enables the police or animal control to take the animal until a municipal court judge determines whether the dog is considered dangerous. Previously it was up to the city's mayor to make the call on whether an animal should be taken by authorities and if it should be destroyed.

The revised ordinance also includes language about what constitutes a violent animal. Neither the breed of a dog, nor growling and barking will be used to determine whether it is dangerous.

In addition, the ordinance lists six situations in which a dog bite or attack should not be used to determine whether a dog is dangerous. They include instances in which a dog bites to protect or defend a person or itself from predatory attacks or abuse.

Force said it has been several years since the city received a complaint regarding vicious dogs. In that case, two pit bulls from an unincorporated area ran in a pack in the city biting residents. Those animals were later destroyed, Force said.

There have been at least four serious pit bull attacks in St. Charles County since April, one of them fatal.

Last spring, in response to similar residential complaints about the breed, a St. Charles city councilman attempted to require owners of pit bulls and Rottweilers to confine the dogs and maintain a minimum \$100,000 in liability insurance.

After accusations of "breed profiling," that proposal was later revised. The final version passed in April required the insurance to be carried only by owners of identified vicious dogs, not particular breeds.

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