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Owners of dangerous dogs that attack humans or animals would be subject to tough new regulations under an emergency ordinance that Metro Councilman Mike Walker is taking to the council today.

After a pit bull mauled a boy in his district in March, Walker initially pushed for breed-specific regulations directed at pit bulls despite warnings about possible constitutional problems from the East Baton Rouge Parish Attorney's Office.

But with little support on the council to specifically target pit bulls, Walker revised his strategy and asked the Parish Attorney's Office to direct the proposed regulations at all dogs that have been deemed dangerous, regardless of breed.

By declaring the measure an emergency ordinance, Walker is attempting to make the new law effective as soon as the 12-member council can muster at least a seven-vote majority to pass it.

Mayor-President Kip Holden, said he does not mind the council enacting an emergency ordinance, as long as it does not contain any breed-specific provisions that could prompt a constitutional challenge.

"The only caution I would give is that they need to make sure that whatever they enact is constitutional, or else it's going to cost the taxpayers a lot of money," Holden said.

Walker could not be reached for comment Tuesday, but his legislative aide Zona Pickens said the ordinance takes the regulations Walker had initially aimed at pit bulls, and applies them to all dangerous dogs.

To be branded a "dangerous dog," canines must have "attacked, caused serious injury to or otherwise endangered the safety of human beings," or must have shown a tendency or disposition to attack humans who are conducting themselves peacefully and lawfully. The dangerous dog label would not apply to dog attacks on humans who unlawfully

enter the owner's property, or who commit other crimes.

In addition, dogs can be deemed dangerous if they are used for fighting other dogs, or if the dog has attacked, caused serious injury to or killed a domestic animal.

Walker's proposed regulations would require owners of dangerous dogs to place microchips in their pets for identification purposes, and to confine them in a house, a locked fenced yard or a kennel.

Dangerous dogs caught roaming loose would fetch their owners a \$50 fine on the first offense if the canine is spayed or neutered, or \$75 if it is unaltered.

In addition, owners of the dangerous dogs would have to post a \$100,000 bond or show proof that they have \$100,000 of liability insurance on the animal.

On behalf of the Endangered Breeds Association that has successfully challenged several breed-specific laws and bans, Doris Hutson said the major problem with dangerous dogs in the parish stems from a lack of enforcement.

New plan targets all dangerous dogs

"I really think they should enforce the ordinance that they already have on the books before they pass anything new," Hutson said.

City-parish Animal Control Director Hilton Cole declined comment on the proposed ordinance, but said he's had problems hiring and retaining animal control officers under the current pay plan.

"I lost another animal control officer yesterday, so we're down to four for the entire parish," Cole said.

But Cole said the city-parish personnel committee signed off on a proposal Tuesday that will boost the starting pay for animal control officers from \$21,376 to \$24,746 per year. After a year, the officers would go to a higher classification that pays \$25,983.

Cole said he's currently budgeted for seven animal control officers, and hopes that the proposed new salaries — which still need council approval — will help fill the three vacant positions. In addition, Cole said he's working with Holden's administration to justify the need for more animal control officers in 2008.

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