

**Animal Control Board
Tuesday, August 13, 2024
Penn Room / Hybrid**

Members Attending: H. Brown – in person; A. Miller, D. Straub, J. Auchter, A. Cordero, S. Baller
- virtually

Others Attending: S. Smith – in person; M. McCrystal, C. Reed - virtually

Call to Order

Ms. Miller called the meeting to order at 6:33 pm. She noted that a quorum was present.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes

Motion was made by Mr. Straub, seconded by Mr. Brown, to approve the May 22, 2024 minutes as written. Motion carried unanimously.

Animal Control Agency Report

No report

Old Business

- **1023 Greenwich St** – more than 6 dogs / cats

Mr. Reed stated that he has been unable to contact the owner. He stated that he left an application form under the door but there has been no response.

This property will be removed from the agenda until additional information or complaints are received.

- **539 Maple St** – more than 6 dogs / cats

Mr. Reed stated that property repairs are occurring through federal funding.

Ms. Miller questioned if the group should wait for additional complaints. Mr. Reed explained that Property Maintenance cannot force entry into an owner occupied property. He suggested that the ARL may have more authority in these cases.

Ms. Baller stated that ARL is unable to verify the number of animals at this property. She stated that she found no other violations.

There was a brief discussion explaining the roles of Property Maintenance and ARL in animal complaints for new member, Jon Auchter.

Rachel Harnish, ARL Animal Control Officer, connected to the meeting virtually at this time.

This property will be removed from the agenda until additional information or complaints are received.

- **242 Linden St – rabbit odors**

Mr. Reed stated that he could find no evidence of rabbits.

Ms. Baller stated that there is one rabbit on the second floor rear porch. She stated that she has been unable to contact the owner. She stated that photos provided by the neighbor show a healthy animal with partial shelter. She stated that the neighbor frequently makes complaints about neighbors to the City. She expressed the belief that the conditions do not rise to the level of seeking a warrant for entry.

Ms. Harnish stated that she made multiple attempts to contact the owner but has been unsuccessful.

Mr. Straub questioned the reported smells. Ms. Baller stated that the neighbor reported smells and that she also cleans the animal from time to time. She expressed the belief that this is a neighbor issue and not necessarily an animal issue. Ms. Miller agreed.

Mr. Auchter noted the need for people to understand that not everyone cares for their pets in the same manner. He noted the need to abide by the laws but that sometimes conditions need to be accepted by others.

Ms. Harnish stated that she has not seen excess feces during her visits.

Mr. Reed noted the issues caused when neighbors don't talk to one another.

This property will be removed from the agenda until additional information or complaints are received.

Mr. Auchter questioned if a search warrant can be obtained with proof of deplorable conditions. Ms. Baller stated that a search warrant is considered on a case-by-case basis. She noted the need for an eyewitness and photographic proof and a willingness to testify.

- **Feeding Outdoor Animals**

Ms. Miller stated that the Board discussed issuing public service announcements regarding outdoor feeding in the City.

Ms. Baller stated that the City must create the language and the ARL will share it.

Ms. Miller suggested having the announcement complete by the spring.

Mr. Reed stated that he will work with Ms. Smith to draft the language and work with the City's Communication Coordinator to post the information on social media.

Ms. Miller noted her hope that the information will also be shared with Police so that they don't threaten those who are feeding outdoor animals.

Ms. Baller stated that if a brochure is created it can be distributed by the ARL.

Mr. Straub suggested creating brochures for the City's top animal issues and complaints. Ms. Baller stated that this would be helpful. She suggested including information about leash laws, outdoor feeding, permits / licenses, and curbing your dog.

Ms. Miller suggested a brochure highlighting cat issues and one highlighting dog issues.

- **Providing Education at Community Events**

Ms. Baller stated that ARL is invited to City events and they attend as many as they are able. She stated that the City and ARL Communication Coordinators have a working relationship.

- **Zoning Ordinance Amendment**

Ms. Smith stated that the Zoning and Planning Offices are working on several Zoning Ordinance amendments. She stated that the Animal portion of the amendment will be part of the Phase 3 update and explained the need to better coordinate permits for animals.

New Business

- **1711 Cotton St – 2 dogs, 5 cats**

The updated permit application has been submitted.

Ms. Harnish stated that the property passed the ARL inspection. She recommended the approval of this permit.

Ms. Mikulsky, ARL CEO, connected to the meeting virtually at this time.

Ms. Baller moved, seconded by Mr. Brown, to approve the permit for more than 6 dogs / cats for 1711 Cotton St. Motion carried unanimously.

Reports of Cock Fighting

Mr. Reed stated that he has not received any specific information about cock fighting.

Ms. Baller stated that ARL also has not received any specific information. She stated that this has been reported to other animal agencies but they also have no specific information. She stated that none of the reports of chickens have shown any signs of fighting.

Ms. Miller stated that roosters are not allowed in Reading. Mr. Reed agreed and stated that farm animals are not allowed in the City unless they get approval from the Zoning Hearing Board.

Expiring Permits

- **1034 Court St** – 22 cats, 1 dog

These animals are no longer at this location. This property will be removed from the agenda.

- **2416 High St** – chickens, ducks

Mr. Reed stated that the coops remain but he did not see evidence of ducks or chickens.

- **2329 High St** – chickens

Mr. Reed stated that the coops remain but he did not see evidence of chickens.

- **732 Thorn St** – chickens

Mr. Reed stated that he cannot determine if there are chickens on the property.

Other Matters

- **620 Mulberry St** – operating cat rescue

Mr. Reed stated that this property was reported to the City. He stated that cat rescues are not allowed in this zoning district as it would be considered a kennel. He stated that it was reported this afternoon and he has not yet done any additional follow up.

Ms. Baller stated that this property owner surrendered a large number of cats in the past but that she does not have a permit for more than 6 dogs / cats. She stated that ARL worked with the owner from November 2023 through January 2024 and she was cooperative at that time. She stated that the property would pass the ARL inspection if she applied and that the cats are healthy.

Mr. Reed stated that violations were issued in the past and the required corrections were made. He stated that he will visit the property but that it is owner occupied so he may not gain entry.

Ms. Baller suggested visiting the property together.

Mr. Reed stated that zoning will follow up with enforcement since the property is being advertised as a cat rescue without permits. He stated that he is familiar with this owner.

Ms. Baller stated that the owner has been cooperative in the past and that this is the first complaint since January 2024. She stated that the owner knows that she needs to apply for a permit but has not.

Mr. Straub questioned if there were State regulations that could be applied. Ms. Baller stated that there would be if this was dogs but there are no State regulations regarding cats.

- **952 N 10th St** – more than 6 dogs / cats

Ms. Harnish stated that there are more than 16 cats in the basement of this property. She stated that the cat owner moved and left the animals behind. She stated that there has been no contact with the owner. She noted the strong odors which can be smelled outdoors. She noted the need to work with the landlord.

Mr. Reed stated that he will research the property to determine the property owner's contact information.

Ms. Miller stated that this poses health issues for the cats other residents in the property, and neighbors.

- **1505 N 12th St** – more than 6 dogs / cats

Mr. Auchter stated that there are continual problems with the 9 huskies at this property escaping and running loose. He stated that they are often located along Route 12 and that one was killed in this area.

Ms. Baller stated that this owner has been cited in the past but that there have been no new complaints. Mr. Auchter stated that there have been no behavior changes.

Ms. Baller suggested that Mr. Auchter provide additional information to ARL and be willing to testify.

Mr. Auchter stated that he receives regular reports from neighbors. He stated that many times the animals are bleeding when they are recovered.

Ms. Baller requested that the neighbors contact ARL when the animals have escaped. She stated that ARL will do a wellness check but she needs eyewitnesses. She noted her understanding of neighbors' frustration.

Ms. Miller expressed the belief that if these neighbors are bothered that much, they should be willing to intercede and assist the ARL.

Mr. Auchter stated that he works to keep the animals safe but they are always returned to this irresponsible owner.

Mr. Reed stated that he is not familiar with this situation and requested that neighbors also contact the Citizen Service Center to report the issues so that he can also follow up.

Ms. Miller stated that nothing can be done if conditions are not reported.

- **Abandoned Gerbils**

Mr. Auchter stated that he found a container of gerbils that were abandoned in the trees on Oak Lane. He stated that they have been adopted by a school. He stated that when additional gerbils were located, ARL was contacted about picking them up.

Ms. Baller stated that ARL requests that animals be dropped off if possible. Mr. Auchter stated that they did eventually pick them up.

Ms. Baller stated that ARL doesn't have enough staff to pick up animals which is why they encourage them to be dropped off. She stated that those who need pick up service may need to wait for a lengthy period of time.

Mr. Auchter stated that many pets are abandoned along Oak Lane.

- **Board Duties**

Mr. Auchter questioned if Board members had responsibilities and duties between meetings. Ms. Miller stated that Board members do not generally have duties between meetings. She stated that Ms. Smith will contact the Board for assistance as needed.

- **Home Breeding**

Mr. Auchter questioned what the City can do to assist local rescues to address home breeding. He expressed the belief that many of these animals end up in shelters.

Ms. Miller stated that these situations should be reported to ARL so that they can be shared with the Dog Warden.

Ms. Harnish stated that puppies do count toward the animal limit. She stated that many puppies are surrendered which increases the intakes at ARL.

Mr. Auchter questioned if the owners can be fined. Ms. Harnish stated that ARL prefers to work with the owners. She stated that owners are advised that if the breeding continues, they will be reported to the Dog Warden. She stated that so far the issues have only occurred one time.

Mr. Reed stated that staff must follow City ordinances. He suggested that some ordinances may require updates.

Ms. Miller stated that this is a good project for Mr. Auchter. She suggested that he do some research and make amendment suggestions. She stated that the City and ARL rely on people reporting what they see but that these breeders find loopholes.

Ms. Baller stated that ARL doesn't get complaints about breeding. She agreed that it can be addressed through the animal limit.

Mr. Auchter suggested that a breeder fee may limit the number of owners who do this.

Ms. Baller stated that if the same location has more than 26 new animals in a year a kennel license is required. She stated that this is enforced by the State but that it is difficult to prove.

Mr. Auchter noted his understanding of privacy and ownership rights.

Ms. Baller stated that some owners breed on purpose but it is accidental in other cases. She stated that many people cannot afford to spay or neuter their animals.

Next Meeting

Ms. Miller suggested meeting before the end of 2024. The group decided to meet in mid-December. Ms. Smith was asked to poll members closer to that time to choose a meeting date.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk