



MINUTES

**Animal Commission Meeting
Second Floor Conference Room
Monday, April 4, 2016
6:00 p.m.**

DRAFT

Members Present: Kevin Collins , Marion Ignoffo & Bill Urquhart

Members Absent:

Staff Present: CSO Manager D. Hayse, Recording Secretary K. Hodge

Others Present:

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

I. Roll Call - Roll Call was taken. All members were present.

II. Approve Minutes – Commissioner Ignoffo made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 15, 2016 meeting. Commissioner Urquhart seconded. The motion passed.

III. Action Items

1. Review Case #16-00669

The following persons indicated their presence: victim dog owners Mr. Paul Schwartz and Mrs. Susan Schwartz, offending dog owners Ms. Mary Lynn Desmeules and Mr. Victor Islas, Attorney Janet Maxwell-Wickett representing Ms. Desmeules, and witness Ms. Sarah Coffey. Commissioner Ignoffo summarized the report and asked Mr. Schwartz to describe the events as he remembered them.

In summary, Mr. Schwartz stated that his dog, Molly, is a 55 pound 5-year-old female mix of cattle dog and bluetick coonhound. He takes her to the park three to five times a day. On the day of the incident, at approximately 6:15 p.m. they went to the park and he saw Ms. Coffey and her dog, as well as two other dogs off leash. He let Molly off leash and she and the biting dog, Grace, came nose to nose. Grace pinned Molly down and grabbed her by the neck. Mr. Schwartz jumped on top of them and tried separating them. Once they were separated, Grace also bit at Molly's hind quarter, and then Molly took off running and Grace ran after her. Ms. Desmeules called for Grace and she eventually retreated and was placed back on leash. Mr. Schwartz was able to get a handle on Molly and brought her home. Mr. Schwartz and Molly were covered in mud from the incident, and upon cleaning her up, he noticed lacerations and puncture wounds near her stomach and hind quarter also. He then contacted the police to make a report. Mr. Schwartz provided pictures of the wounds and a report from the veterinarian detailing the wounds and surgery required. Mr. Schwartz added that immediately after the incident he was verbally abusive and made inappropriate comments and he regretted it and apologized.

Ms. Desmeules questioned the validity of the pictures, saying it did not look like Mr. Schwartz's dog. Ms. Coffey said it was the dog and she saw the wounds as well.

Mrs. Schwartz stated that you could see the puncture wounds, but there was also internal damage and Molly had subcutaneous stitches as well. Mr. Schwartz added that he has been going to the park for about 15 years, and in the morning people socially gather there with their dogs, and there has never been an incident like this before.

In summary, Ms. Desmeules stated that they had recently moved here from Canada, and neighbors told them that it was ok to have the dogs play off leash at the park. On the evening of the incident, she first met Ms. Coffey and their dogs played nicely. Then she saw Molly running toward them barking and yapping, which made Grace nervous, so Grace pinned Molly. Then Mr. Schwartz lunged onto the dogs and pushed Grace away. Then Grace chased Molly, but Ms. Desmeules called her back and placed her on the leash. Mr. Schwartz then returned holding his dog and calling Ms. Desmeules names. She tried to ask if Molly was ok, and tried to look but didn't see any signs of the bites. Ms. Desmeules added that Grace was bought in South Africa and travelled to Canada, where they lived and went to dog parks there. Grace has not had issues before when meeting other dogs, but after this incident she was nervous and took Grace to a veterinary behaviorist at the University of Illinois to be evaluated. Ms. Kelly Ballantyne, DVM, prepared a written assessment which stated that Grace demonstrated a fear-related aggression due to a perceived threatening incident, which Ms. Desmeules stated was Molly running up to Grace and barking. Attorney Maxwell-Wickett added that there was no behavioral pathology indicated in Grace.

In summary, Ms. Coffey stated that she went to the park with her golden retriever Shelby, who was running off leash. Shelby ran after Ms. Desmeules' two dogs and then Ms. Desmeules and Ms. Coffey began to converse when she saw Mr. Schwartz and Molly approaching. Ms. Coffey stated that she did not see Molly go after Grace, but she saw Grace go after Molly and put her mouth around Molly's back and thrash her around. Mr. Schwartz tried to pull them apart, and Molly escaped, but Grace started chasing her. Molly ran across the street, which she never does, she usually stops. When Mr. Schwartz came back with Molly, they did not see any blood at that point. Ms. Coffey added that Molly is not a small yappy dog, as Ms. Desmeules stated.

Commissioner Urquhart asked if Grace had any obedience training. Ms. Desmeules stated that she had puppy training and is very social, has been to doggy daycare, and she offered to show pictures and video of Grace playing with other dogs. She stated that she is surprised by this process and is struggling to understand the point of it.

Commissioner Urquhart stated that all of the parties involved think nothing of the letting their dogs off leash in parks where this is not allowed. He stated that there are dog parks that they can register to be a part of. Not all Park Ridge parks are dog parks.

Commissioner Collins added that he used to live across the street from the park where this incident occurred and every Saturday morning people gathered with their dogs off leash. He saw dogs running into cars and getting too close to the kids. When a dog is off leash, the owner does not have control of the situation, so everyone is at fault for this incident happening. This was preventable, and it's an owner's responsibility to keep the dog on leash.

CSO Manager Hayse stated that every officer has discretion and they have to respond to higher priority calls. But with the increased number of dog bites and loose dogs, enforcement will become a priority.

Discussion ensued regarding the classifications of "at-risk" and "dangerous" dogs. Attorney Maxwell-Wickett commented that all parties were treating this park as a dog park, but

Commissioner Collins clarified that it is not a dog park. He added that the dog owners cannot treat any common area as an ok place for dogs to be off leash.

Commissioner Ignoffo made a motion to deem the dog, Grace, “at-risk” and Commissioner Collins seconded the motion. All the Commissioners unanimously agreed that the dog was “at-risk”.

Ms. Desmeules commented that she does not want her dog to be stigmatized and she did not see a benefit to this. Commissioner Ignoffo stated that these are the rules of the City of Park Ridge.

2. Review Case #16-00679

The following persons indicated their presence: victim Ms. LeAnn Helmrich, offending dog owner Mr. Robert Pechacek, and witness Mr. Andrew Desmedt. Commissioner Ignoffo summarized the report and asked Ms. Helmrich to describe the events as she remembered them.

In summary, Ms. Helmrich stated that every day she walks from the train station down Virginia to Wesley. On the day of the incident, she was walking home and saw the dog being walked on leash towards her. Usually, as dogs and their owners get closer, they step to the side, but this dog and the owner were walking down the middle of the sidewalk. As she passed the dog and owner, Ms. Helmrich walked into the grass and the owner said, “She’s ok.” Then the dog’s ears went back, Ms. Helmrich lifted up her arm and the dog jumped up and grabbed ahold of the arm and sleeve of her coat, but did not tear the coat. Ms. Helmrich pulled her arm and the owner pulled the dog down. The owner asked if Ms. Helmrich was ok, and she told her no, the dog scared her and to get ahold of her dog. When Ms. Helmrich got home, she was more upset and called to report the incident.

Mr. Pechacek stated that he is the dog owner, and his pregnant girlfriend was walking the dog that day. The dog, Roxy, is a 7-year-old female and spayed.

In summary, Mr. Desmedt stated that the incident happened in front of his house. He said Roxy is a boxer and a jumpy dog, but her teeth are dull. He was talking to the owner, Ms. Homa, and as the victim walked up, they stopped talking and Roxy turned and jumped. He said that Roxy is not an aggressive dog, she just barks. Roxy plays with Mr. Desmedt’s young kids, dogs and cats and there are no problems.

Mr. Pechacek stated that Roxy plays with small dogs and his niece without any problems. He stated that his girlfriend was distracted talking to the neighbor, and because of this incident she no longer walks Roxy.

Commissioner Ignoffo asked if Roxy had formal training. Mr. Pechacek said no, but they used a shock collar to teach obedience and for keeping her close. He added that he is sorry she scared a neighbor, and Roxy should not have lunged at Ms. Helmrich.

Commissioner Urquhart said the dog probably did grab her arm, but probably not in a vicious manner. If the dog wanted to bite her, it would have. He added that when walking Roxy, the owners should keep her alongside of them as a courtesy to others who may be afraid of dogs.

Commissioner Ignoffo made a motion to dismiss the case, and Commissioner Urquhart seconded the motion. Motion carried.

IV. Old Business

1. Dogs off leash at parks

The commissioners addressed this issue during review of the first case, 16-00669. CSO Manager Hayse reiterated that the officers would be reminded to stop by the parks when time permits to address this issue. Also, if anyone witnesses this violation, the best course of action is to call the police, which ensures an officer will be assigned the call and then must respond. CSO Manager Hayse also stated that each beat in town has an assigned Beat Team Leader, and if they are made aware of ongoing problems, they can also work on addressing it in their beats.

Commissioner Urquhart stated that people will start listening to these warnings when they go to adjudication and are fined for their violations.

Commissioner Ignoffo suggested that when people pay for their animal license, they also be provided a copy of the local ordinance on Animals. CSO Manager Hayse and Recording Secretary Hodge said they would follow up on that idea.

V. New Business

1. Cook County's Animal Ordinance

All commissioners reviewed Cook County's Ordinance. They agreed that the current Park Ridge Animal Ordinance works well and does not require any changes or updates at this time.

2. Animal Commission Rules

All commissioners reviewed the suggested rules. There was consensus to place the rules on the next agenda for action.

3. Scheduling another meeting

Recording Secretary Hodge stated that the Commission needs to schedule another meeting to consider removing some animals from the "at-risk" and "dangerous" lists. CSO Manager Hayse stated that a CSO followed up on compliance of all dogs on the list. The check revealed some animals have moved out of town, so those animals will be addressed at the next meeting as well.

VI. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:24 p.m.