

Alternative Solutions To ‘Vicious’ Animals Problem Presented To Alton City Council

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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ALTON - Alternative solutions to the problem of “vicious” cats and dogs in Alton were brought before the City Council on Wednesday, prompting a discussion which turned heated when one resident criticized Public Works Director Mike Parsons for [referring to animals as “things”](#) at the Committee of the Whole meeting on Monday.

Resident Bill Galbraith introduced himself as a “lifelong pet owner” and said he took offense to Parsons saying that “things have to be euthanized so you can make room for other things” at the Committee of the Whole meeting on Monday.

“You don’t have an opinion about considering animals to be ‘things’ to be euthanized?” Galbraith asked the City Council members. He said he’s called the Mayor’s office to ask his opinion on the comment, but hasn’t received any response.

“I have an opinion about ‘things,’ I sure do.” Parsons replied. When Galbraith asked Parsons to tell him his opinion, Parsons replied, “I sure will - let me tell you something.”

The exchange was cut off when Alderwoman Stephanie Elliott said the conversation was not being conducted appropriately and called for Galbraith to finish speaking.

“If he was working for me, he would not be working for me anymore,” Galbraith said of Parsons. “One main measure for me of the character of a person is how they treat the weakest among us. These dogs, these cats, are not criminals, they’re not nuisances, they’re victims.

“They’re victims of the people ... who turn their animals loose to run through town or abandon them when they get tired of them, like ‘things,’ like toys that are no longer of use. That comment is absolutely despicable to me, absolutely.”

Galbraith also recommended the city eliminate the Animal Control department entirely and partner with local animal rescue services instead, who he said can “do twice the work half the price,” adding those organizations are “people who really care about those animals, not who think of them as ‘things.’” Parsons did not reply to any more of Galbraith’s comments during the meeting.

Ledy VanKavage, senior legislative attorney for Best Friends Animal Society, said another solution could be tweaking ordinances Alton already has on the books.

“We understand that there are animal issues here in Alton and in other places, but your ordinance is actually pretty good,” VanKavage said. “A lot of the policies, they just need to be tweaked.”

“We were able to get legislation passed to target reckless owners through the state legislature two years ago, and I think we could - if the issue is reckless owners letting their dogs run at large - basically, you can pass an ordinance that ... they can be declared a ‘reckless owner’ or ‘habitual offender,’ and they can’t own a dog in the city for three years, five years, whatever you would decide.”

VanKavage said Best Friends Animal Society has resources available and is “more than willing to try to help” bring things like mass spay/neuter clinics to Alton in collaboration with Metro East Humane Society. Another thing they suggest to prevent overcrowding is practicing “return to field,” where animals are returned directly to their areas of origin instead of bringing the animal to the shelter or Animal Control.

She concluded by saying her goal is to help “make Alton a safe and humane community,” and said: “Whatever we can do to help, we are more than willing.”

Alderwoman Rosie Brown said Juneteenth Committee Director Abe Barham re-discovered a standing city ordinance dealing with this very topic in city parks, which Brown believes could be part of the solution if enforced.

The ordinance, number 7403, was made effective on May 14, 2014. It states that the city had a problem with people walking aggressive dogs which were intimidating and potentially endangering city park visitors. The ordinance added the following statement to the [Alton City Code](#):

“It shall be unlawful for the owner of any dog to allow the dog to enter or remain in Hellrung Park or James H. Killion Park At Salu, whether restrained or unrestrained. Any dog found in Hellrung Park or James H. Killion Park At Salu may be taken by police or the animal control officer and impounded in accordance with section 7-12-6 of this code. This section shall not apply to any specially trained service dog while in the service of a handicapped person.”

A full recording of the July 26 meeting can be watched at the top of this story or on the [Riverbender.com Facebook page](#).

