

Animal control proposal offered

Humane Society representative denies harassing city employee over duties

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A proposed ordinance which attempts to pull all of Forrest City's laws dealing with animals into one document was presented to the city council last night.

There was also a lengthy discussion among council members and a representative of the Forrest City Area Humane Society, partly over a city employee's accusation of harassment by Humane Society members.

The council did not hear first reading on the 23-page ordinance; Glenn Shepherd, who drew up the proposal, merely passed out copies to council members for them to review. He also made copies available to the Humane Society and the media.

The ordinance deals with dogs, cats, wild animals of all kinds, livestock, reptiles, and how animals should be confined. It also covers impoundment of animals, and defines nuisance and vicious animals. It also provides for licensing and tags for dogs and cats.

The ordinance also mentions an "Animal Services Advisory Board." The board's job would be to review and recommend changes to the city's animal ordinance, and review other topics that concern the care and safety of animals inside the city. Pet owners could also appeal decisions by the animal control supervisor, in writing, to the board.

Councilman Cecil Twillie asked Shepherd if he used other cities' laws as a guide, and Shepherd said most of his ordinance was based on Conway's. Twillie also asked if he had talked to Conway about that city's barking dog regulation, a subject which came up at a recent Forrest City meeting.

"Conway has one, but it's difficult to enforce," said Shepherd, echoing concerns that had been expressed at the recent meeting.

"So it's easy to write but difficult to enforce," said Twillie, and suggested that the council go over the proposed ordinance carefully.

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On another animal-related subject, council member Henry Peacock brought up a letter all the members had received from Roy Hamilton, animal control director.

The letter states that according to the employee handbook, city employees are to report harassment in writing. Hamilton claims in the letter that he has been subjected to verbal abuse and interference with work from members of the Humane Society.

"I am subject to rude comments and snide remarks from Humane Society members. Over the last several months, I have found documents and complete files missing and file cabinets broken into," the letter states in part.

Peacock said, "As a former city employee (Fire Department), I've got a problem with this. And my question is, what are we going to do about it? For a man, woman, boy or girl to be trying to do their duties that they have been instructed by the city to do, and they are feeling as if they are in a hostile environment, this is no good...This is Forrest City, this is home, we have got to do better."

Council members Danny Capps and Chris Oswalt said the employee handbook provisions are to protect employees from other employees. For problems from outside, the employee might have to seek legal means.

Peacock then asked if there was a representative to speak on behalf of the Humane Society. The room was full of Humane Society members and supporters.

Twillie objected to having Humane Society members speak. "It seems like to me we're holding court," he said. "I don't think it's our job to hold court in a situation like this."

The council recently voted to seek legal action to determine the actual ownership of the animal shelter building and the land on which it is located.

Peacock insisted, and after more discussion, Gay Schwartz was allowed to speak for the Humane Society.

"As far as I know, and as far as anything I've witnessed out there, everybody has been very respectful," said Schwartz. "Trust me. That has been our operation. We don't call names...Our problem out there is the gentleman doing his job...I'm sorry things have evolved, but if the gentleman was doing his job, it would be different."

She said no one has broken into anything, and no Humane Society members go out to animal shelter alone.

Peacock suggested time

frames for entering the building.

"We've got a city building that is open," said Peacock. "Animal control officers may go in and do whatever, the Humane Society may go in do whatever, and here I am as a city council member, and I don't have a clue."

He said they need to have the building secure but have someone on call to meet with Humane Society members and let them in the building.

"But we just can't have a free roam, we've just got to get some control. I'm not saying lock the Humane Society out, but we've got to have some control on who's coming in and who's doing what," Peacock said. "We have no other city facility that is wide

open like this."

Peacock made a motion to change the locks but to keep someone at the fire department on call to let Humane Society members in if they need in. A similar proposal had been made at the most recent meeting, but no action was taken.

Schwartz said that according to the Humane Society's lawyer, the Humane Society owns the building.

To that, Shepherd responded, "I don't know how you can say you own the building, when we spent \$200,000 putting it out there."

Peacock was asked to re-state his motion, which he did.

Oswalt said he did not like the

idea of changing the locks, since the building's ownership is going into litigation.

Eventually, Twillie seconded the motion, which failed. Voting yes on changing the locks were Twillie, Louise Fields and Peacock. Voting no were Steve Hollowell, Shepherd, Capps and Oswalt. Mary Jeffers was absent.

In other action, the council voted to remove language from the personnel policy handbook, which required a city employee, who resigns within 90 days of being hired, to reimburse the city for his or her physical exam. Oswalt said he believed the change needed to be made because of the wording of a new state law.