

# Call for pit bull ban goes unanswered

By Tara Alexander

Staff writer

After hearing the protests of a dozen local residents opposed to a ban on pit bulls and other vicious dogs, the Hodgkins Village Board took no action to outlaw them in the village.

Trustees fell silent after President Noel Cummings, who supports a ban, asked trustees to make a motion on the matter during a special meeting held March 22.

Instead of moving to ban pit bulls, Trustee Paul Struve made a motion to adopt Ryan's law, which is already in place under state law. Trustee Vicky Moxley seconded the motion, but it was later decided to address the issue at the next Police Committee meeting, which has yet to be scheduled.

The Ryan Armstrong Law does not ban a specific breed of dog, but holds pet owners responsible for the actions of dangerous and vicious pets.

Struve, who had previously been an outspoken proponent for the ban, said he changed his mind after reading letters and hearing comments from residents. He was especially impacted by the comments of a woman who said she would feel uncomfortable living in the kind of town that would impose a specific breed ban.

Preventing dog attacks is a matter of strict laws, not breed banning, according to Jeff Armstrong of Melrose Park, whose son Ryan survived a vicious 2001 dog attack. Armstrong went on to lobby for tougher state legislation, which was eventually named after his son.

"Based on fairness, we all have a right to property," Armstrong said.

"All dogs can bite; I've got stories of a Chihuahua that attacked a police officer," he said.

Other residents raised concerns that the board was moving to the most severe measure too quickly.

"Why are we going right to the ban? Why can't we go to the education, hold the owner responsible?" asked Bobby Drake of Hodgkins.

Some residents told the board that pit bulls are not a specific breed, and a variety of canines may fall into the category of pit bull.

While many residents appeared satisfied that the board did not ban pit bulls, some in the crowd would have liked to see the outcome go another way.

When he addressed the board, Jimmy Barnes of Hodgkins asked only that

residents be required to carry proper insurance for their pets. But Barnes would have been happy to see the breed banned, he said in a separate interview after the vote was taken.

"My grandson was bitten by a pit bull and it was unprovoked. It jumped over a 4-foot fence," he said. Barnes ended up paying \$5,000 out of pocket to pay for his 19-year-old grandson's plastic surgery, he said.

But to other Hodgkins residents, such as Christina Lee, the breed ban would have meant harming dog owners who care about their animals, without solving the real issue. Lee owns an American bull dog, which she feared may be discriminated against under the potential ban.

"I don't think it would take care of the problem they are looking at," Lee said in a separate interview.

"To ban a specific breed, I think that they are really hurting the homeowners that love these dogs," she said.

Following the meeting Trustee Ernest Millsap said he would still favor a ban on pit bulls, with the current pit bulls grandfathered into a new ordinance. He decided not to make a motion to pass the pit bull and vicious dog ban because he felt the "vicious" part of the ordinance was problematic.

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