

Aurora Mayor Tom Weisner is calling for tougher local dog laws

Weisner: Put more teeth in dog laws

By Andre Salles
Staff Writer

AURORA — In the wake of a weekend attack on two women by a pair of pit bulls, Aurora Mayor Tom Weisner is calling for tougher local dog laws.

"People have a right to walk in their neighborhoods without feeling threatened by dangerous dogs," Weisner said Monday. "All Aurorans will benefit from a stronger law that holds owners accountable and protects the public from dangerous attack dogs."

Katrina Harden, one of the two women attacked early Saturday morning, says she's having trouble sleeping.

"I have nightmares," she said. "I shake and scream. I can't sleep. I just see that dog coming at me."

Harden, 33, was attacked around 3:30 a.m. by two pit bulls outside an apartment building on Second Avenue. She escaped with only a bite to the arm, requiring three to five stitches. The other victim, 44-year-old Joan Ware, was bitten on the legs, and was also treated at Rush-Copley Medical Center.

"It happened all of a sudden," said Harden, who lives across the street from the scene. "I was coming down the street from a friend's house, and I heard barking, but I didn't see nothing. I turned, and they came running out of nowhere."

Harden said she ran into the street, flagging down a passing car. She leaped into the passenger seat, and the driver, a stranger to her, let her in and honked his horn to scare away the dog.

"It was the only thing I could think of to do," she said. "I appreciate that stranger for stopping for me. I still don't know his name, but I know I owe him a cleaning bill for all the blood."

An Aurora police officer was dispatched to the scene, and was forced to shoot one of the dogs in the head. The injured animal was taken by Aurora Animal Control, and later euthanized.

The second dog fled, but Animal Control later apprehended it. Harden and Ware positively identified the dog as their other attacker.

Animal Control Director Linda Nass said the dog was taken by Kane County Animal Control, and will be held for 10 days for a rabies observation. If no one comes forward to claim the dog by then, Nass said, it will be euthanized.

Strengthening local laws

Weisner's plan is to put together a task force to delve into the city's dog laws, looking for ways to strengthen them. The group will include members of the Police Department, Legal Department, Aurora Animal Control and a local animal welfare organization, as well as representatives from the offices of the mayor and aldermen.

"I think what we're looking for is a law that protects the public before a dog attack," said City Public Information Officer Carie Anne Ergo. "A lot of the laws we have now are reactive."

The task force will meet for the first time next Tuesday, Ergo said, if all the schedules align. While the public will not be a part of the initial process, the task force's recommendations are expected by early July, and will go through the committee process, Ergo said, which includes public comment.

'They're vicious killers'

Weisner's call for tougher laws comes less than a week after Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed into law three bills that crack down on owners of dangerous dogs. The new laws increase penalties for owners who don't spay or neuter their dogs, or properly confine them. They make owners liable for damages in civil court if their dogs attack someone unprovoked, and increase jail times for owners whose dogs attack someone.

Illinois is also the first state to ban felons, such as drug dealers and violent criminals, from owning dogs that have been deemed vicious or dangerous, or haven't been fixed.

All of which is fine with Harden. In fact, this lifelong animal lover thinks these laws don't quite go far enough.

"I believe pit bulls should be banned in the state of Illinois," she said. "They're not house dogs, they're vicious killers, and people breed them to fight."