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# More pit bull restrictions make sense

Pit bulls, trained properly, can be loving, gentle family pets. But in Wichita, too many pit bulls are terrorizing neighborhoods.

It's a tragedy waiting to happen.

That's why the city of Wichita is right to propose new rules on dangerous dogs of all kinds -- and, just as important, problem owners.

For whatever reason, pit bulls pose a special problem here.

Consider: Of the 5,400 dogs housed in a city animal shelter last year, some 1,500 of them -- about 1 in 4 -- were pit bulls.

Police statistics reveal the aggressive nature of this breed: Of the 23 dogs shot by Wichita police last year, 17 were pit bulls.

And pit bulls seem to be a favorite of irresponsible breeders. Too many pit bull owners buy the breed because of its macho, fight-dog reputation and train the dogs to be mean and vicious.

It's true that any dog can be aggressive and bite. But pit bulls -- because of their power, size and fighting instincts -- pose a special danger, especially to children and the elderly.

Under the proposed ordinance change, convicted felons couldn't own pit bulls (or any other dog deemed dangerous), and owners would be limited to two pit bulls instead of four, as under current law. Pit bulls would have to be spayed or neutered and have a microchip implanted in them so owners could be traced.

Moreover, anyone whose dogs, regardless of breed, produce more than one litter of puppies a year would be required to pay a \$150 breeder's fee to help ensure standards and regulate the population.

Perhaps the most important change would allow animal officers to issue a dangerous-dog hearing on any animal that exhibits a pattern of snarling, threatening behavior.

At present, a dog must bite someone before its owner is hauled before a hearing.

Better safe than sorry.

Kay Johnson, director of the city's environmental services, stressed that the new rules aren't just about pit bulls or bite attacks. The city has a real problem with dogs of all kinds running loose in neighborhoods, unleashing fear among residents.

"People should not be afraid to walk down their streets," she told The Eagle editorial board.

The new rules face public comment in the coming weeks. It's possible that some of the rule changes might need adjustment. But taken as a whole, these are reasonable, balanced proposals.

It's important to note that this is not a breed ban -- people can still own pit bulls. Responsible owners have nothing to fear from these changes.

What the new ordinance will do is give animal control a better tool to collar problem dogs and irresponsible owners.

For the editorial board, Randy Scholfield