

Charter & Ordinance Committee  
Meeting minutes Wednesday, July 25, 2018

Committee members present: Aldermen Rebecca Mattis (chair), Will Notte, Melinda Humphrey, Lisa Ryan.

Others present: Attorney Matt Bloomer; Aldermen Matt Whitcomb and Paul Clifford; Gordon Dritschilo of the Herald; city residents Deb Roy, Kam Johnston, Scott Holmquist, and Lynne Holmquist.

The committee met to discuss Chapter 3, Section 3121 and 3122 of Rutland City Ordinance (Public Health Nuisances), specifically, goats and fowl.

The chair passed out photographs provided by Tony Pagano of his backyard goat enclosure to the committee. He owns two pet pygmy goats, and the photographs indicate a neat, sanitary and comfortable enclosure within a spacious yard.

City resident Deb Roy, who lives near these goats, said she would like to see changes to the ordinance. She didn't have a specific complaint about a health nuisance; rather, she said she believes goats are not a fit for the city and is concerned that they might bring down property values, no matter how cleanly they are kept.

City resident Lynne Holmquist discussed her concerns about chickens. She and her husband have rats on their property, and the exterminator suggested that perhaps chickens in the neighborhood were contributing to the rats. (Not the chickens themselves, but their feed, water, etc.)

During the previous Charter & Ordinance committee meeting this past April, we had a thorough discussion of city ordinance, the balance of personal liberty and community responsibility, fairness among pet owners of different species, and the enforceability of ordinance. These complex issues were discussed again. In summary, some favor a complete ban on livestock-style pets. Others believe that would be too restrictive and unfair. All are concerned about public health, and the best way to maintain standards of health while allowing responsible residents to keep various pets, acknowledging that there are many more potential causes of public health issues (and property value concerns) than just pets.

Attorney Bloomer again suggested that a more detailed ordinance would be less vague and more enforceable in the eyes of the law. Alderman Notte cautioned that the most detailed ordinance can be useless without an actual means of enforcement. Alderwoman Ryan reminded the committee that chasing after chickens would put an undue burden on the animal control officer. Attorney Bloomer still believes that detailed legislation will better guide agricultural-type pet owners and result in fewer health issues upfront. A ban on all animals over a certain weight was also suggested.

Alderwoman Humphrey pointed out that we need to know how much of an issue these kinds of pets actually are. Therefore, it was agreed that the chair will contact the animal control officer and the health officer to see how many complaints are received in a year.

The issue remains in committee; this report is for information only.