

Commission debates animal ordinance amendment

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Is it better to cut requirements in the Taos County animal control ordinance that may be difficult to enforce, or keep them on the books to prevent people convicted with animal or human abuse from owning pets?

Taos County commissioners continued to debate the county's animal control ordinance it approved in August. During the Tuesday (Feb. 2) meeting, the commission discussed whether it was appropriate to keep requirements that limit who can own an animal even though those requirements complicate the process of getting a license.

As written, the ordinance bars people from getting a "companion animal," or pet, license if they've been convicted of animal cruelty, failed to reclaim an animal from a shelter, have surrendered an animal within one year after adoption or been convicted of child or domestic abuse.

A multi-page companion animal application asks people if they've been convicted of these crimes.

The commission is concerned the requirements are difficult to enforce and make the application process too lengthy. Committee members discussed whether the language should be removed from the ordinance completely, or if it is possible to remove the questions from the application while keeping the requirements in the ordinance.

The commission tabled a set of proposed amendments, but continued to discuss removing all of the questions on the application that directly related to animal cruelty, prior animal offenses and domestic abuse in Section 3-1B in the ordinance (available at [www. taoscounty.org](http://www.taoscounty.org)).

Quela Robinson, assistant county attorney, addressed the commission to explain that the questions were on the application because the application is directly based on the ordinance.

Commissioner Candyce O'Donnell, District V, suggested shortening the application to one page. She asked for clarity about why the ordinance even asked applicants about child or domestic abuse.

Taos County Sheriff Jerry Hogrefe responded, "It has been documented again and again" there is a correlation between domestic abuse and cases of animal abuse.

Commissioner Tom Blankenhorn, District IV, proposed that all five points be removed from both the application and the current ordinance, saying it would make licensing easier in the earlier stages. An easy application is a better way to "build our base," he said.

Hogrefe encouraged the commission to “follow the guidance of the committee that spent a lot of time and energy on the recommendation that is now in place.”

O’Donnell questioned how the sheriff’s office would enforce these requirements.

“In stages,” replied Hogrefe. “The disposition would come from court,” he said. “We have a diligence and duty to identify a problem before it becomes a problem” with procedures like requiring background checks for animal license applicants, he said.

Commission Chair Jim Fambro, District I, recommended keeping the language in the animal ordinance as it is.

“It’s a lengthy process,” said Robinson of the nine months the commission worked with animal advocates and nonprofits like Stray Hearts, the nonprofit that’s contracted to handle animal sheltering services for the county. Due to publication requirements in state law, it will take another three to four weeks before the commission can discuss any newly proposed amendments again.

The issue may be discussed at a work-study session for the commission next week.