

News

Dog confinement law posed to Blount County Commission

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Update: *The County Commission [voted to adopt](#).*

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Should Blount County residents be required to keep their dogs confined to their own property? This question will be discussed at next Tuesday's County Commission meeting.

Confinement is already required in many Blount County municipalities, including [Oneonta, Blountsville, and Cleveland](#). But since the county has not adopted Alabama Code § 3-1-5, dogs in unincorporated areas can run free.

[Alabama Code § 3-1-5, the running-at-large statute](#), stipulates that dogs be confined to the owner's premises or, if off premises, kept in the owner's charge. An exception is made for working farm dogs and hunting dogs. Though commonly referred to by the misnomer of "leash law," Alabama's law makes no mention of leashes.

The statute has been adopted in most neighboring counties, but in Blount County has been discussed [only twice](#) in Commission history and has never been brought to a vote.

This third discussion is on the agenda by request of Pine Mountain resident Terry Palmore, who views adoption as necessary for public safety. "Let's not be one of those counties that acts only after a tragedy," Palmore said. "Let's be a forward-thinking county."

Karen Startley, director of [Blount County's animal shelter](#), shared a similar perspective. Without the statute, "the only thing Animal Control can cite people on is a rabies law violation* or if a dog hurts someone," Startley explained. "So there's no way to prevent something happening — there's only reaction."

Palmore's concern began 10 years ago when he left his house for a jog. "I ran half a mile down the road and this huge dog came out." Palmore addressed the neighbor with the help of Animal Control, and "a week later an invisible fence went up," he said, which solved the problem.

But Palmore kept seeing Facebook posts about dogs approaching Blount County residents on roads or at mailboxes.

Animal Control receives many such calls, Startley confirmed. When the situation is addressed with the dog owner, “most people will say, ‘Oh my gosh, I didn’t know that. Let me do something about it,’” Startley said. “But there are those few who will not help us help themselves.”

Startley has also noticed an evolution in attitudes over her lifetime in Blount County. Whereas in the past a resident might address an issue directly with his neighbor, she said, these days more people expect Animal Control to step in.

Adoption of the state law would allow Animal Control to cite owners of dogs running at-large. The law would not affect unowned dogs, which Animal Control already impounds.

Violation would be a misdemeanor with a fine of \$2–50, an amount that is low by modern standards, but when established in 1915 was equivalent to \$60–1500 in today’s dollars. In addition to the fine, the violation may carry court costs, which could range in the hundreds of dollars.

The question of whether to adopt the at-large statute would require consideration of its potential impacts on county administration, on residents, and on dogs. As one example, Blount County’s 650 square miles are currently served by a single Animal Control Officer, who is “already really busy,” Startley said. Would enforcement require an increased number of officers? How might the court system, the budget, the shelter be affected?

“It would be more work for us,” Startley expressed regarding the Animal Adoption Center of Blount County, “but we need something.”

The Commission meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 9, at 9 a.m. at the Blount County Courthouse. If you would like to express your thoughts at the meeting, call the Commission office at 205-625-6868 and ask to be added to the agenda.

Thanks to Rachel Simmons and Mark Staton for their assistance with county documents, and to Lori Howell and Aubrie Kavanaugh for sharing their knowledge of and experience with confinement law.

**Actually, ACOs have no authority to enforce violations of the Alabama rabies code.*