



## Watsonville council rejects rules targeting pit bulls

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WATSONVILLE — Dogs aren't the problem. People are.

That was the conclusion of the Watsonville City Council on Tuesday, when they rejected enacting regulations targeting specific breeds of dogs.

Instead, the council directed staff to stiffen existing rules, develop an educational outreach program and explore having city or civil court authorities oversee vicious dog hearings. Specific proposals will be brought back to the council at a later date.

City leaders decided to explore their options after two pit bulls escaped from a yard in June and killed five cats and frightened neighbors. Pit bulls also were involved in two other conflicts in 2007.

"In many cases it's not the dog, it's the owner," said Councilman Manuel Bersamin. "Sometimes teens get pit bulls to add to their sense of manliness. I don't know if they're good owners. ... We only find out when there's an attack."

Several people spoke out against adopting specific regulations for pit bulls, Rottweilers or other large breeds.

City Finance Director Marc Pimental, who helped prepare the report to the council, said while targeting breeds was an option, he didn't recommend it. Cities that have adopted such legislation have found themselves fighting court battles.

"It's far too risky for the city to consider," Pimental said.

Christine Allen, a local member of San Francisco-based Bad Rap, a pit bull rescue group, praised the city for emphasizing outreach.

"A lot of times it is the owner," she said. "A lot of these owners don't know they can do it better. They don't know how. They don't have the resources."

She and representatives from canine clubs based in Oakland and Gilroy offered to help the city reach out to owners. Jose Martinez, president of the Golden State American Staffordshire Terrier Club, said his group could provide classes and clinics.

"There are no bad dogs, just bad owners," he said.

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