

County Bans Tethering Unattended Dogs

New Hanover County, N.C., commission votes to update ordinance.

Posted: March 15, 2007, 5 a.m. EST

After nearly an hour of debate on March 12, the New Hanover, N.C., County Commission voted to make it illegal to leave a tethered dog unattended, or to use chains and ropes as leashes under any circumstances.

Supporters called the decision a major step in protecting public health, while opponents labeled it as an attack on responsible dog ownership. County health officials have said that strengthening the existing laws would benefit the majority of county residents.

Local veterinarian Robert Weedon, who's also a county Board of Health member, testified during the commission meeting that studies show chained animals are involved in three times as many bite incidents as non-tethered dogs.

But opponents of the restrictive leash law countered with Katherine Houpt, a veterinarian from Cornell University who said that during a four-month study she conducted of sled dogs, there was no behavioral difference between tethered and non-tethered animals.

Several speakers said people, not dogs or housing techniques, were responsible for bad behavioral tendencies.

The debate over the county's tethering ordinance began in October 2006, when a breeder was cited for having one of her Bulldogs tied up in her fenced backyard.

The breeder, who was inside her home at the time, challenged the \$250 fine and the vagueness of the ordinance.

The ordinance change is expected to undergo a second, binding vote during the board's April 2 meeting.