



**Thursday, January 23, 2025, 5:30 PM, Contois Auditorium 2nd Floor, City Hall OR
REMOTELY via ZOOM**

When: Jan 23, 2025 05:30 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)
Topic: Ordinance Committee Public Hearing on Cat Licensure

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1. Public Hearing on Cat Licensure

Subject	1.1. Public Hearing on Cat Licensure
Meeting	January 23, 2025 - Ordinance Committee Public Hearing on Cat Licensure - Thursday, January 23, 2025, 5:30 PM, Contois Auditorium 2nd Floor, City Hall OR REMOTELY via ZOOM
Category	1. Public Hearing on Cat Licensure
Department	Council and Board

Type

Recommended Action

Burlington Ordinance Committee

Public Hearing

January 23, 2025

The Dog Task Force's recommended amendments to the city ordinances pertaining to identification, licensure, are other regulation of cats are inserted and underlined in the current ordinance sections, below. Text that would be eliminated is indicated by strikethroughs. A summary of the grounds for each recommended amendment is provided in italics. Full citations can be found in the Dog Task Force Final Report.

Art. I, sec. 5-4 Nuisance animals.

(a) ~~No-owner guardian~~, keeper or other person having control shall permit an animal to be a nuisance animal. For the purposes of this section, nuisance animal means any animal or animals ~~which~~ who:

- (1) ~~Molests Attacks~~ or harasses passersby or passing vehicles, or otherwise creates a public safety hazard;
- (2) Attacks other animals, including but not limited to wildlife;
- (3) Damages property other than that of ~~their~~ its-owner guardian;
- (4) Defecates off the premises of the animal's ~~owner guardian~~, and the ~~owner guardian~~, or other individual in control of the animal, fails to remove such deposit immediately;
- (5) Roams off the premises of the guardian while not under control of the guardian, or the guardian's agent, by leash or other similar means of physical restraint at all times; or
- (5 6) Barks, whines, howls, cries, or makes a noise commonly made by such animals in an excessive and continuous fashion so as to disturb the peace and quiet of any other person.

(b) Any dog or cat found to be a nuisance animal by an animal control officer shall be impounded if the guardian, or the guardian's agent, is not present and cannot be located immediately.

Section 5-4 expands the definition of "nuisance animals" to include free-roaming animals. It also authorizes law enforcement to impound a "nuisance animal" if the

animal's guardian, or the guardian's agent, is not present or readily located, and it requires impoundment of free-roaming animals under such conditions.

Art. 2 Identification required. (New section.)

Identification that includes the name and contact information for the guardian of the dog or cat shall be securely attached to a collar or harness and worn at all times.

Section 5-14 is a new section that requires dogs and cats to wear identification that includes the name and contact information for the guardian. This requirement serves to protect companion animals, and benefits animal control efforts and public safety as well.

Rhode Island summarizes the benefits of such an ordinance in the preamble to a state law that requires identification for cats. Specifically, the Rhode Island legislature determined:

- (1) Cat identification would provide cats protection under the law, equal to that afforded dogs, by establishing ownership which, in turn, would encourage cat owners to take full responsibility for their pets' welfare.*
- (2) [Already required in Vermont] Cat identification would protect cats, as dogs are now protected, by establishing minimum holding periods for cats released to and/or impounded by municipal animal control facilities and private animal shelters.*
- (3) A program to require cat identification should facilitate the return of lost, owned cats.*
- (4) Cat identification would provide a method to help distinguish between owned and unowned cat populations thus assisting animal control officers and animal shelters in carrying out their mission.*
- (5) Cat identification would advance the reduction of the untold suffering of cats at-large in our state by helping to insure the quick return of injured and sick animals to their owners.*
- (6) Passage of this bill would reduce the number of unowned cats and increase education to owners as to the need for sterilization of cats, thereby reducing unwanted litters, eliminating cat over-population problems, and reducing the costs to cities and towns for euthanizing at-large or unowned cats.*
- (7) Cat identification would help support public health and safety in the control of rabies.*

R.I. Gen. Laws § 4-22-1.

Art. II, sec. 5-14 At-large prohibited.

(a) *Prohibition.* Except as exempted below, no person shall permit a dog or cat for whom they are the guardian ~~him or her~~ or who is ~~under his or her~~ their control to be at-large as defined in section 5-13 or to trespass upon the property of another, public or private.

(b) *Public Safety.* Should an at-large dog or cat be deemed to pose an imminent public safety risk, said animal may be killed by the Police Department or their designee. Such an act shall occur where other reasonable means to control the animal have been unsuccessful or deemed not practicable under the circumstances.

(c) *Exemptions.* A dog or cat ~~may be~~ is not at-large if ~~it is~~ they are:

- (1) On the premises of the dog's or cat's ~~owner~~ guardian;
- (2) On the premises of the person under whose control the dog or cat is under; or
- (3) On the premises of another person as long as that person has given permission for the dog or cat to be at-large;
- (4) A dog is not at-large if they are in a designated off-leash dog area managed and regulated by the board of parks and recreation commissioners.

Section 5-15 as currently written prohibits at-large dogs. The proposed amendment includes cats in this prohibition. The Task Force considers the amendment necessary for the welfare of cats, the protection of wildlife, and public safety. The American Veterinary Medical Association ("AVMA") provides a Model Dog and Cat Control Ordinance that requires all dogs and cats "be kept under restraint" for these very reasons. A number of municipalities in Vermont, for example South Burlington, Shelburne, and Stowe, have followed the AVMA's lead and prohibit at-large cats and/or include at-large cats in the definition of "nuisance animal," and impose fines and/or permit their impoundment.

The Welfare of Cats: *As the AVMA and other authorities recognize, free-roaming cats are likely to have a reduced life span and may be exposed to injury, suffering, and death from vehicles, attacks from other animals, disease, cruel acts by humans, poisons, traps, and weather extremes. Burlington's resident cats have not escaped these harms.*

The Protection of Wildlife: *The American Bird Conservancy succinctly summarizes the detrimental and deadly impact of free-roaming cats on native species of wildlife:*

Outdoor domestic cats are a recognized threat to global biodiversity. Cats have contributed to the extinction of 63 species of birds, mammals, and reptiles in the wild and continue to adversely impact a wide variety of other species, including

those at risk of extinction, such as Piping Plover ...The ecological dangers are so critical that the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists domestic cats as one of the world's worst non-native invasive species.

In the United States, it is estimated that outdoor cats kill approximately 2.4 billion birds every year, earning the distinction of the number-one direct, human-caused threat to birds. Between 6.9 to 20.7 billion small mammals are killed by cats each year, and researchers believe that between 258 to 822 million reptiles and 95 to 299 million amphibians may suffer the same fate.

Burlington is an environmentally conscious community, and the Task Force suggests that a prohibition on free-roaming cats is simply good environmental stewardship.

Public Safety: *The scientific literature documents that free-roaming cats pose a significant threat to public health because they can carry and transmit a number of zoonotic viruses, bacteria, and parasites, such as rabies and toxoplasmosis. Notably, according to Peter Marra, a professor of biology and the environment at Georgetown University, "[d]ogs used to be the primary way humans picked up rabies from domestic animals ... [b]ut we started licensing dogs and requiring leash laws and rabies vaccines. Now, dogs are not the problem at all—it's primarily cats."*

The Task Force recommends that the city prohibit free-roaming cats for the reasons stated herein.

Art. II, sec. 5-15 License and rabies vaccination required.

(a) *Licensing.* Every ~~owner or keeper~~ guardian of a dog or cat more than six (6) months old ~~who has resided in the city for more than 90 days,~~ shall be required to ~~annually register and license the animal, in the manner prescribed by the city, with the city clerk's office and to do so annually provided that no guardian shall be required to register a dog or cat more than once in any calendar year.~~ The license shall expire on the first day of April next after its issuance. Upon issuance of such license and payment of the license fee as required in section [5-17](#) of this chapter, each ~~dog owner~~ guardian shall receive a ~~dog~~ license tag.

(b) *Rabies vaccination.* Proof of a current rabies vaccination, as required by state law, shall be required for the licensing of any animal.

(c) *Fixture of tag.* The ~~dog~~ license tag issued to any person as provided herein shall be securely attached to a collar or harness on such licensed dog or cat and worn at all times.

Section 5-16 extends the requirement for a license to cats. Such requirements have been shown to improve the welfare of cats, increase public safety, and enhance the quality of life

in their communities, much like the identification requirements discussed above. Municipalities across the country have implemented cat-licensing requirements, including jurisdictions in Vermont such as South Burlington and Shelburne.²⁷

The Task Force recommends that the city require licenses for cats for the reasons stated herein.

DOG TASK FORCE PRESENTATION

Jan. 23, 2025

Brief history of the Dog Task Force and the three key recommendations pertaining to cats – identification, licensing, and free-roaming cats (2 min) – Unless the committee intends to do either or both as an introduction.

Short video on the case for indoor cats (9 min.)

Expert statements (5 minutes or less each; 20 min. max)

Please note that the experts will need to participate remotely, unfortunately. We tried our best to have them attend in person but Grant Sizemore is located in D.C., Dr. Cottrell is a caretaker for his wife, Dr. Larson is currently recovering from COVID, and Bren Lundborg, should he be able to speak, is located in Woodstock. Nonetheless, we feel strongly that their collective expertise will be educational and thus useful to the public. The experts have been provided with the Zoom link in the agenda.

- Grant Sizemore, M.S., CWB is Director of Invasive Species Programs at the American Bird Conservancy and runs ABC's cat program.
- Walter Cottrell, DVM, is a veterinarian and a wildlife biologist in Vermont with expertise in zoonotic diseases transmittable from outdoor cats to humans.
- Peggy Larson, DVM, is a veterinarian in Vermont with expertise in the dangers to outdoor cats.
- *Tentative:* Bren Lundborg is the Assistant Director of the Center for Wild Bird Rehabilitation and Ambassador Care at the Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS).

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We also will have three handouts for the public to pick up and assume there will be a table where the public will sign up to speak and the handouts can be placed there:

1. A one-page fact sheet that we created that summarizes the reasons for the Task Force's recommendation with regard to outdoor cats.
2. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) policy on outdoor cats.
3. The American Bird Conservancy's publication "How to Make Your Outdoor Cat a Happy Indoor Cat."

We will need to be able to project the PowerPoint video onto a screen from our computer for viewing by the public.