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Pit bull hearing continued

BY PATRICIA ROY PROY@HOLDENLANDMARK.COM

HOLDEN — Misjif the pit bull has earned a stay of execution.

Owners Mark Cripps and Maryhelena Windsor- Cripps received a continuance at a hearing in Leominster District Court on July 20 and another hearing will be set after the court receives a report from a veterinary behaviorist.

Dr. Nicholas Dodson, who practices at Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, evaluated Misjif on July 22. Dodson, described on the Tufts website as "one of the world's most noted and celebrated veterinary behaviorists," tested Misjif for 90 minutes for aggressive behaviors.

"They really put the dogs through their paces," Windsor-Cripps said. "If the animal behaviorist's report is not good, I will have her put down, no matter how much I love her."

Clerk magistrate Michael Croteau said that he would rely heavily on the report when he rules if the dog needs to be euthanized. The Crippses must turn the report over to Holden Police Chief George Sherrill and animal control officer Michael Sendrowski, who will have two weeks to review it. The Crippses will appear before the court again in August.

"I must be convinced the public is safe," Croteau said.

The Crippses got Misjif as a 2 1/2-year-old in December. By spring, the dog had racked up a list of aggression complaints from residents in the Shrewsbury Street and Woodridge Road neighborhood, leading to a June 7 hearing where selectmen voted to euthanize the animal.

One neighbor reported the dog violently attacked a goat the Cripps family owned, and another reported seeing Misjif loose by a school bus stop. A landscaper working at a neighboring house said the dog butted its head against a fence attempting to break through to him. In May, Misjif bit Woodbridge Road resident John Melliker, leaving him with a gash over one eye and an arm wound requiring seven stitches.

Misjif has been quarantined twice. Holden ACO Sendrowski said he observed the dog could be docile at times. Health agent Andrea Crete and Animal Rescue League staff reported the animal was gentle.

"It could be 'Jekyll and Hyde' is my concern. It's wise to err on the side of caution. I don't know if we can take a chance on this dog when it gets loose," Sendrowski said.

Windsor-Cripps said she thought some reports of Misjif being loose were mistaken identity, possibly involving a similar looking dog from West Boylston.

She acknowledged that it is possible that someone let Misjif out when when family were visiting while she and her husband were not home.

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Although Misjif did bite the family's goat, the bite was not fatal, according to a health agent report. The Crippses chose to have the 14-year-old goat put down.

At the August hearing, town officials and the Crippses can bring in anyone, such as neighbors or the animal behaviorist, to testify.

Until that time, the dog is to be secured at all times and the entire Cripps family must be responsible for keeping the dog in the house. The selectmen ordered the dog to be kept in the yard; they cannot take it on vacation.

"After all is said and done, that dog is not to be seen in the neighborhood," Croteau said. If the dog gets out, it will be a very difficult obstacle for the Crippses to overcome in their case, he said.

The hearing could be continued for a year, if the behavior report is favorable and the police department agrees, Croteau said.

"The town has made its decision. They want the dog euthanized. Now the ball's in your court," Croteau told Misjif's owners.

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