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Pit bull prejudice?

Misjif's family appeals euthanization order, blames dog's bad rap on gossip
BY MELISSA MCKEON MMCKEON@HOLDENLANDMARK.COM



Misjif the dog has been ordered destroyed, but his family is appealing the selectmen's decision. Submitted photo

The family that owns a three-year-old pit bull named Misjif has appealed an order by selectmen that she be destroyed.

The case is set to be heard in Leominster District Court on July 1.

The Holden select board voted 4-1 on June 7, with Chairman David White voting against having the dog destroyed after hearing testimony from MaryHelena Windsor-Cripps and Mark Cripps, the owners of Misjif, and from their neighbors. They also heard Holden Police

Chief George Sherrill recommend that the dog be destroyed.

Holden Animal Control Officer Michael Sendrowski stopped short of such a recommendation.

The Crippses had 10 days from the date of the ruling to appeal, and say they have filed an appeal and received a court date of July 1 to hear the case.

The case came before the select board after Misjif bit Woodridge Road resident John Mellecker in the face and wrist, requiring stitches and a long recovery from infection. Mark Cripps was walking Misjif at the time, and she was on a leash.

It wasn't the first complaint about Misjif; neighbor Kate White, whose yard faces the Crippses' back yard, testified at the select board meeting that she saw and heard the dog attack the Cripps family's goat. The goat was subsequently put to sleep. Windsor-Cripps said that was going to happen anyway, because the goat was elderly. Holden Health Agent Andrea Crete verified Windsor-Cripps's evaluation with the veterinarian.

The dog was quarantined for 10 days on both occasions, once at home and, after biting Mellecker, at the Worcester Animal Rescue League.

Other incidents said to involve Misjif are disputed by the Crippses, who say their dog is never loose. A contractor at the home of a Shrewsbury Street family said the dog was loose and charged at him aggressively, with a fence between them, on one occasion. Another neighbor claimed she was trapped in her car by fear of the dog's aggressive behavior

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The Crippses say the situation is the result of neighborhood gossip and misunderstandings of pit bulls, and perhaps mistaken identity.

Misjif is the Cripps family's second pit bull; their previous dog, Jinx, died last May at the age of 11. When the family went looking for another dog, they heard of another pit bull whose family could not take her to a military base. They visited the dog, and liked her.

"We decided we liked her temperament," Windsor-Cripps said. "We took her for a trial and we liked her."

They say the dog has never put anyone else in fear, not their regular visitors, including several small children, nor a cleaning person who comes in and puts the dog out. Windsor-Cripps said the incident with Mellecker was just a bad set of circumstances, that when Mellecker bent down and offered his hand to the dog she felt threatened.

"It was unfortunate," Windsor-Cripps said. "I'm very upset about Mr. Mellecker being hurt."

Windsor-Cripps said the other incidents were cases of mistaken identity, that another dog must have put those other folks in fear, because Misjif is locked inside the home all day long.

Since the incidents, Misjif has not been taken out without a muzzle, she said. Since the hearing, they've not been allowed to take her off the property.

Mark Cripps agreed with his wife that the family would agree to a judgment mandating a behavioral evaluation for Misjif, something that select board Chairman David White suggested at the hearing.

"We're open to any suggestions," Cripps said.

Cripps says his dog has never been aggressive toward people before, and that any dog can be aggressive enough to bite under the right circumstances.

Windsor-Cripps thinks much of what's happened is the result of prejudice against pit bulls, and she's concerned about what might happen if Misjif is put down and the family gets another pit bull.

"Are we going to face the same prejudice?" she asked.

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