

## **TOWN OF WESTFIELD ORDINANCE REGULATING DOGS AND WOLF-HYBRIDS**

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**SECTION 1. AUTHORITY.** This ordinance is adopted by the Town of Westfield under authority of 20 V.S.A. § 3549, 24 V.S.A. §§ 2291 (10), (14), and (15), and 24 V.S.A. Chapter 59 and establishes regulations and governs the keeping and control of dogs and wolf-hybrids within the Town of Westfield.

**SECTION 2. PURPOSE.** The purpose of this ordinance is to regulate the keeping of dogs and wolf hybrids and to provide for their leashing, muzzling, restraint, impoundment, and destruction, to protect the public health and safety of the Town and preserve the quiet enjoyment of its residents' homes and properties.

**SECTION 3. DEFINITIONS.** For purposes of this ordinance, the following words and phrases shall apply:

**A. "Dog"** means any member of the canine species. For purposes of this ordinance, this term shall also include "wolf-hybrids" and "working farm dogs" except as otherwise stated.

**B. "Domestic animal"** means cattle, sheep, goats, equines, deer, American bison, swine, poultry, pheasant, Chukar partridge, Coturnix quail, psittacine birds, ferrets, camelids, ratites (ostriches, rheas, and emus), and water buffalo. The term shall include cultured fish propagated by commercial fish farms.

**C. "Domestic pet" or "pet"** means any domestic dog, domestic cat, or ferret.

**D. "Enforcement Officer"** means any Town Constable, Police Officer, Animal Control Officer, Humane Officer, or any other person designated as an Enforcement Officer by the Selectboard.

**E. "Impoundment"** means being held by the Town at a place designated by the Selectboard. Such a place may or may not be operated by the Town and may or may not be within Town limits.

**F. "Owner"** means any person who has actual or constructive possession of a dog. The term also includes those persons who provide food and shelter to a dog.

**G. "Potentially vicious dog"** means a dog that, while running at large: inflicts minor injuries on a person not necessitating medical attention; chases, worries, threatens to attack or attacks another domestic pet or domestic animal; causes damage to personal or real property; chases a person; or causes any person to reasonably fear attack or bodily injury from such dog. This definition shall not apply if the dog was protecting or defending itself, its offspring, another domestic pet or animal or a person from attack or assault or the person attacked or threatened by the dog was engaged in teasing, tormenting, battering, assaulting, injuring or otherwise provoking the dog.

**H. "Premises"** means the home and real property of the dog owner.

**I. "Running at large"** means that a dog is not:

- a. on a leash; or
- b. in a vehicle; or
- c. on the owner's premises;
- d. on the premises of another person with that person's permission; or
- e. clearly under the verbal or non-verbal control of its owner.

- J. **“Wolf hybrid”** means an animal that:
- a. is the progeny of a dog and a wolf (*Canis lupus* or *Canis rufus*); or
  - b. is advertised or otherwise described or represented to be a wolf hybrid; or
  - c. exhibits primary physical and/or behavioral wolf characteristics.

- K. **“Working farm dog”** means a dog that:
- a. is bred or trained to herd or protect livestock or poultry or to protect crops; and
  - b. is used for those purposes; and
  - c. is registered as a working farm dog pursuant to State law.

#### **SECTION 4. NUISANCES.**

**A. Prohibitions.** An owner of a dog shall not allow, permit, or suffer such dog to create a nuisance. The following activities shall be deemed nuisances:

**Nuisance One - Lack of current license and/or rabies tag:** A dog without a collar or harness with a current license and/or valid rabies tag securely attached.

**Nuisance Two - Running at large:** A dog running at large in the Town.

**Nuisance Three - Failure to remove waste:** A dog that defecates in any public area or on the private premises of another person and whose owner does not immediately remove the fecal material and dispose of it in a sanitary manner.

**Nuisance Four - Unconfined dog in heat:** A female dog in heat not confined to a building or other secured enclosure, except while under the direct control of the owner.

**Nuisance Five - Disturbing the Peace:** A dog that disturbs the peace and quiet of any other person by excessive barking, whining, calling, biting or howling.

**Exemptions:**

- Any event such as dog shows, sled dog racing, or dogs that are hunting with a Vermont licensed hunter shall be exempt.
- Any dog who is provoked by another animal, person, machinery, or unnatural event shall be exempt.
- Any situation that is not already mentioned, if the Enforcement Officer handling the case believes it to be necessary, shall be exempt.

**Nuisance Six: Potentially vicious dog** A dog that while running at large: inflicts minor injuries on a person not necessitating medical attention; chases, worries, threatens to attack or attacks another domestic pet or domestic animal; causes damage to personal or real property; chases a person; or causes any person to reasonably fear attack or bodily injury from such dog. This definition shall not apply if the dog was protecting or defending itself, its offspring, another domestic pet or animal or a person from attack or assault or the person attacked or threatened by the dog was engaged in teasing, tormenting, battering, assaulting, injuring or otherwise provoking the dog.

**B. Exemptions for Working Dogs.** The provisions of the sections pertaining to running at large and disturbing the peace shall not apply to working farm dogs if the working farm dog is:

- barking to herd or protect livestock or poultry or to protect crops; OR
- running at large to herd or protect livestock or poultry or to protect crops.

**SECTION 5. COLLAR AND LICENSE.** Each dog shall be licensed according to the laws of this State and shall wear a collar or harness with the current license attached. A dog that is visiting from out of state must wear a collar or harness with a current license from its home state attached. A dog found without a collar or harness and license shall be in violation of this Ordinance and may be immediately impounded.

**SECTION 6. ENFORCEMENT.** A violation of this Ordinance shall be a civil matter which may be enforced in the Vermont Judicial Bureau or in the Orleans County Superior Court, at the election of the Selectboard. Violations enforced in the Judicial Bureau shall be in accordance with the provisions of 24 V.S.A. §§ 1974a and 1977 et seq. For purposes of enforcement in the Judicial Bureau, any Enforcement Officer shall have authority to issue tickets and represent the Town at any hearing. Violations enforced in the Superior Court shall be in accordance with the Vermont Rules of Civil Procedure. The Town may pursue all appropriate injunctive relief.

**SECTION 7. PENALTIES AND COSTS.** A violation of this ordinance shall be a civil matter enforced in accordance with the provisions of 24 V.S.A. §1974a and §1977 et seq. For enforcement purposes, the issuing municipal officials are the Enforcement Officials defined in Section 3. For purposes of calculating the sequence of offenses, offenses shall be counted against the owner. A warning shall not be counted towards the calculation of the number of offenses under this Ordinance.

**A. Nuisance Violation.** Except as specified below, a written warning shall be sent to the dog's owner for the first violation of this ordinance. The Enforcement Officer is authorized to recover a waiver fee in lieu of a civil penalty, in the stated amount, for any person who declines to contest a municipal complaint and pays the waiver fee. A civil penalty of not more than \$100.00 may be imposed for the second offense within a six-month period. The penalty for each subsequent offense within a six-month period shall be \$200.00. The waiver fee shall be set at \$50.00 for the second offense within a six-month period and \$75.00 for each subsequent offense within a six-month period. Each day the violation continues shall constitute a separate violation of the ordinance.

**B. Vicious Dog Violation.** If a vicious dog attack occurs off the owner's premises a civil penalty of not more than \$100.00 may be imposed for the first offense. The penalty for each subsequent offense within the life of the dog shall be \$300.00. The waiver fee shall be set at \$50.00 for the first offense and \$150.00 for each subsequent offense.

**C. Abandonment.** A civil penalty of not more than \$300.00 may be imposed for each offense when a dog is purposely and neglectfully abandoned. The waiver fee shall be set at \$150.00 for each offense.

**D. Lack of Current License and/or Rabies Tag:** In accordance with 20 V.S.A. §3581 all dogs and wolf-hybrids must be licensed annually on or before April 1<sup>st</sup> each year. Failure to register a dog or wolf-hybrid will result in a \$100.00 fine each time the Enforcement Officer has to visit the property in regard to an unlicensed dog or wolf-hybrid.

## **SECTION 8. IMPOUNDMENT.**

**A. Grounds for Impoundment.** Any dog may be immediately impounded if the dog:

1. has been determined by an Enforcement Officer to be a "potentially vicious dog," which presents an imminent danger to people or other animals;
2. has reportedly bitten a person off the premises of its owner;
3. is in violation of State licensing law;
4. has an unknown rabies vaccination history or is suspected of having been exposed to rabies;
5. is running at large;
6. is an unconfined dog in heat; or
7. is found without a collar or harness and license.

**B. Notice of Impoundment.** The officer who impounds a dog shall, within twenty-four (24) hours, give notice to the owner thereof either personally, by telephone call, or by regular mail, postage prepaid, at the owner's last known address. Such notice shall inform the owner of the nature of the violations, the dog's location, and the necessary steps to have it returned to the owner.

If the owner of the dog is unknown, the officer who impounds a dog shall, within twenty-four (24) hours of impoundment, post a public notice. Notification shall be posted in the town clerk's office and other usual places for public notice for a ten (10) calendar day period. The public notice shall include a description of the dog, including any significant marks of identification, and when and where it was impounded or found by the person placing the dog in the town's custody. The public notice must also declare that, unless the owner 1) claims the dog, 2) pays all expenses incurred by the town for treatment, boarding and care of the dog, and any applicable penalties, and 3) takes all necessary remedial action within ten (10) calendar days following posting, the town may place the dog in an adoptive home or transfer it to a humane society or rescue organization. If the dog cannot be placed in an adoptive home or transferred to a humane society or rescue organization, it may be destroyed in a humane way.

**C. Release from Impoundment.** Any dog impounded under the provisions of this ordinance shall be released only on payment of a \$25.00 impoundment fee; provided, however that any dog impounded for the second time in any calendar year shall be released only on payment of a \$50.00 impoundment fee, and if impounded three or more times within a 24 month period, it shall be released only upon payment of a \$100.00 impoundment fee.

In addition to the impounding fees charged herein, there shall be a boarding charge of \$19.00 for each day or fraction thereof during which the dog is impounded.

The Selectboard is hereby empowered to increase the impoundment fees and boarding charges provided for in this section by appropriate resolution. The Selectboard may make such increases in said fees and charges as they deem appropriate and necessary from time to time.

**D. Rabies Suspect.** The procedures provided in this section shall only apply if the dog is not a rabies suspect. If an official designated by the Selectboard to enforce the provisions of this ordinance determines that the dog is a rabies suspect, the Selectboard shall immediately notify the Town Health Officer who shall proceed in accordance with the Vermont Department of Health's rules.

## **SECTION 9. INVESTIGATION OF VICIOUS DOGS.**

**A. Complaint.** When a dog has bitten a person while the dog is off the premises of its owner or keeper, and the person bitten requires medical attention for the attack, such person may file a written complaint with the Selectboard of the municipality. The complaint shall contain the time, date, and place where the attack occurred, the name and address of the victim or victims, and any other facts that may assist the Selectboard in conducting its investigation. The Selectboard shall also immediately notify the Town Health Officer who shall proceed in accordance with the Vermont Department of Health's rules.

**B. Investigation and Hearing.** The Selectboard, within Twenty-one (21) calendar days from receipt of the complaint, shall investigate the charges and hold a hearing on the matter. If the owner of the dog, which is the subject of the complaint, can be ascertained with due diligence, said owner shall be provided with a written notice of the time, date, and place of hearing and a copy of the complaint.

**C. Protective Order.** If, after a hearing on the matter, the dog is found to have bitten the victim without provocation, the Selectboard shall make such order for the protection of persons as the facts and circumstances of the case may require, including, without limitation, that the dog is disposed of in a humane way, muzzled, chained, or confined. The order shall be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the owner. A person who, after receiving notice, fails to comply with the terms of the order shall be subject to the penalties provided in 20 V.S.A. § 3550.

**D. Rabies suspect.** The procedures provided in this section shall only apply if the dog is not a rabies suspect. If a member of the Selectboard or an Enforcement Officer determines that the dog is a rabies suspect, the Selectboard shall immediately notify the Town Health Officer who shall proceed in accordance with the Vermont Department of Health's rules. If the dog is deemed healthy, the terms and conditions set forth in the Selectboard's order shall be enforced.

**SECTION 10. POTENTIALLY VICIOUS DOGS.** A person claiming a dog is a "potentially vicious dog" may file a written complaint with the Selectboard. The complaint shall contain the time, date, and place where the alleged behavior occurred, an identification of the domestic pet or animal threatened or attacked, the name and address of any victim or victims, and any other facts that may assist the Selectboard in conducting its hearing. Upon receipt of a "potentially vicious dog" complaint, the Selectboard shall proceed as in the case of a "vicious dog" complaint using Section 9 B.-D. above, with the exception that if the Selectboard determines that the behavior classifies the dog as "potentially vicious" the Selectboard may order any protective measures be taken absent the dog being humanely destroyed.

**SECTION 11. OTHER LAWS.** This ordinance is in addition to all other ordinances of the Town of Westfield and all applicable laws of the State of Vermont. All ordinances or parts of ordinances, resolutions, regulations, or other documents inconsistent with the provisions of this ordinance are hereby repealed to the extent of such inconsistency.

**SECTION 12. SEVERABILITY.** If any section of this ordinance is held by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid, such finding shall not invalidate any other part of this ordinance.

**SECTION 13. EFFECTIVE DATE.** This ordinance shall become effective 60 days after its adoption by the Selectboard. If a petition is filed under 24 V.S.A. § 1973, that statute shall govern the taking effect of this ordinance.

Adopted this 15<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2026

SIGNATURES:

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