



City of Racine, Wisconsin
Agenda Briefing Memorandum
Ordinance 0003-26 – Unleashed Animals and Dog Parks

AGENDA DATE:

Intro to Council Date: June 16, 2026
Standing Committee Date: June 24, 2026
Final Action Council Date: July 7, 2026

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REVIEWED BY: Scott R. Letteney, City Attorney

SUBJECT: Communication sponsored by Alder Turquoise-Davis proposing Ordinance 0003-26, Unleashed Animals and Dog Parks.

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS:

Section 10-92 of the Code was created to prevent animals from running at large within the city. Subsection (a) thereunder leaves room for argument that a person may possess an unleashed animal on public property, so long as that person is able to “control and contain” the animal, whether by verbal commands or otherwise. This proposed piece of legislation eliminates the ambiguity by expressly prohibiting unleashed animals that are present off private property and without an exception. These exceptions include, for example, animals secured within a vehicle or carrier, unleashed dogs at designated dog parks, animals used by law enforcement, and service animals as prescribed by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Additionally, this ordinance proposes to amend section 70-90 of the Code to include Jones Park within the list of parks where leashed dogs are permitted. It further proposes to amend section 70-90 by prohibiting violations of rules and regulations that are adopted by the board of parks, recreation, and cultural services commissioners, approved by common council, and posted by an official sign at designated dog parks.

Inserted below are sections 10-1, 10-92, and 70-90 of the Code. Any text in red indicates where each such section is either amended or recreated by this legislation.

Sec. 10-1. – Definitions.

Leash means any lead, harness, or other tether that attaches an animal to someone or something else.

Sec. 10-92. – ~~Animals running at large; penalty.~~

~~(a) Prohibited. No person who owns or is in possession of an animal shall permit such animal to run at large. "Run at large," means the presence of the animal at any place except upon the property of the owner unless the animal:~~

- ~~(1) Is on a leash held by a person physically able to control the animal; or~~
- ~~(2) Is controlled and contained by a person physically able to control the animal; or~~
- ~~(3) Is on private property with permission of the owner of the property.~~

~~(b) Police officers or other persons designated by the city may impound any animal found running at large. If an impounded animal bears identification, such as a microchip or tag, the owner shall be notified. Any impounded animal without a known owner shall be held for no less than seven days during which time the owner may reclaim or surrender the animal. Any animal that has been held for seven days shall become the property of the impoundment facility at the starting time of the eighth day.~~

~~(c) Any impounded animal may be euthanized upon determination that:~~

~~(1) The animal is hopelessly injured beyond any reasonable chance of recovery; or~~

~~(2) The animal poses an imminent threat to the public health or safety; or~~

~~(3) The animal poses an imminent threat to the health or safety of itself or its custodian.~~

~~Any impounded animal to be euthanized shall be humanely destroyed.~~

~~(d) Any owner reclaiming an animal shall pay the normal and customary fees.~~

~~(e) Any owner reclaiming a dog, cat, or ferret must show proof of, or pre-pay for, a rabies vaccination and a city license prior to release from the impoundment facility.~~

~~(f) Any dog or cat found to be running at large for the first time shall be implanted with a microchip at the owner's expense.~~

~~(g) Any dog or cat found to be running at large for the second time shall be neutered or spayed at the owner's expense within 30 days of the second incident.~~

Sec. 10-92. – Running at large.

(a) *Prohibition.* It shall be unlawful for any animal to run at large within the City of Racine. “Run at large” shall mean the presence of an animal that is not on a secured leash of 8 feet or less on any public property or on any private property without the permission of the property owner or occupier.

(b) *Exceptions.* Subsection (a) does not apply to the following:

(1) An unleashed animal that is secured within a carrier that is manufactured for the purpose of transporting an animal.

(2) An unleashed animal that is secured within a vehicle.

(3) An unleashed dog present within the parameters of a designated dog park.

(4) An animal utilized for law enforcement purposes.

(5) A person with express permission from and within the parameters authorized by the health officer; the police chief; the director of parks, recreation, and cultural services; or a designee thereof to possess an unleashed animal on public property.

(6) Where subsection (a) conflicts with the Americans with Disabilities Act under 28 C.F.R. § 35.136(6) or 28 C.F.R. § 36.302(c)(4).

(c) *Responsibility.* The owner or person in possession of the animal running at large shall be cited for a violation of this section. It shall be no defense to a violation of this section that the animal owner was not present or not in possession of the unleashed animal at the time of the violation.

(d) *Impounding.* The police chief or designee may seize any unleashed animal found running at large and may withhold the animal for 4 days to permit the owner to reclaim it; otherwise, the animal may be disposed of as provided by Wisconsin Statutes.

Sec. 70-90. - Animals prohibited.

- (a) No person who owns, possesses, or is in control or charge of an animal shall permit such animal to be in or upon any park, beach, cemetery or public swimming area, except as otherwise provided in this section.
- (b) A duly organized club, society or association which has a primary purpose related to the ownership of a designated kind of animal may apply to the director of parks, recreation and cultural services for permission to rent a portion of Pershing Park or Lakeview Park for the purpose of assembling such animals for an animal show. The director shall forward such application, along with his recommendation, to the board of parks, recreation and cultural services commissioners, which may grant authority for persons to bring such animals into the designated park for the purpose of an animal show. A grounds deposit as specified in the department's schedule of fees and charges as set forth in the fee schedule as established by the common council shall be made at least five days prior to the date of such animal show. The deposit shall be returned within 30 days after the show unless the director finds that the area used was not adequately cleaned. In such event, the deposit shall be forfeited as a clean-up fee and the permittee shall not be eligible to use a city park for such purpose for three years.
- (c) At the direction of the director of parks, recreation and cultural services, designated city staff or contractors may bring onto any city park or beach a dog or dogs trained to chase designated birds, for the purpose of chasing such birds from the premises, but only in accordance with the provisions of a permit issued to the city by the state department of natural resources.
- (d) A person may have a dog or dogs on leash:
- (1) In the area 20 feet easterly of the public right-of-way along Michigan Boulevard from Barker Street to Goold Street and from Romaine Avenue to Melvin Avenue, along Main Street from 14th Street to 17th Street and along Wisconsin Avenue from the North line of 21st Street extended North to a point where the sidewalk ends.
 - (2) In the following parks: Azarian, Back, Carre-Hogle, Colbert, Crosswalk, Dodge, Erskine, Gaslight Pointe, Harris Plaza Island, Jones, Jonas, Dr. King Plaza, Lee, Maple Grove, Monument Square, Myers, Pierce Dr., Randolph, Reservoir, Riverside, Simonson, Springvale-West, State-Hamilton, Thompson and Wallis.
 - (3) On the Root River and Lake Michigan pathways, and where the pathways winds through the following parks, dogs are allowed on the pathways and up to ten feet into the park on either side: N. Owen Davies, Washington, Lincoln, Cedar Bend, Clayton, North Beach, Zoo Beach, and Pershing. (Note: Absolutely no dogs allowed in Colonial Park.)
- (e) Notwithstanding anything else in this Code of Ordinances, leashed or unleashed dogs are permitted within the fenced, designated, and signed dog park area of any city park.
- (f) *Rules and regulations.* It shall be a violation of this section for the owner or person in possession of an animal that is present within a designated dog park to violate any rule or regulation of the dog park that

is adopted by the board of parks, recreation, and cultural services; approved by the common council; and posted by an official sign. It shall be no defense to a violation of this section that the animal owner was not present or not in possession of the unleashed animal at the time of the violation.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: To approve.

FISCAL NOTE & BUDGETARY IMPACT: Citable offenses may result in forfeiture judgments issued in municipal court.