

The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

San Jose to tackle issue of bicyclists with leashed dogs

By Lisa Fernandez
lfernandez@mercurynews.com

Posted: 10/26/2009 04:33:59 PM PDT

Updated: 10/27/2009 04:07:53 AM PDT

Have Your Say!

- Should it be illegal to bike with _____ your dog on a leash?

On the heels of a deadly freak accident, San Jose is exploring a law to make the city the first in California — and possibly the country — to address the issue of bicyclists riding with leashed dogs.

Councilwoman Nancy Pyle is convening a meeting Wednesday night to gauge public opinion on whether the city should clamp down in some way to prevent what happened to Beverly Head on Sept. 16. The retired 62-year-old San Jose phlebotomist died after she hit her head when she got tangled up in a dog leash while walking along a popular South San Jose trail. The dog in question was one of two pets being pulled alongside a bicyclist.

Her death has raised a passionate debate among trail users. And, urged by Head's grief-stricken husband, Pyle's office is studying whether the current laws regarding the safety of the city's trails are enough. Current code mandates that owners must keep their dogs "under control" at all times, and kept on leashes of up to 20 feet in city parks.

"I'd like them to prohibit bicycles on pathways that

pull dogs," Bob Head said on Monday, moments before he took off on a bike ride himself. "For the safety of walkers, and for the safety of small dogs that get pulled along and can't keep up."

Pyle's office has been getting calls and e-mails with "lots of interesting ideas," said Kathy Sullivan, Pyle's chief of staff. "And this is such an emotional issue, we just want to hear from people."

Jon Cicirelli, deputy director of the city's Animal Care and Services, researched all over the state, from San Francisco to Venice Beach in Los Angeles, to see if there is anything on the books that speaks to banning bicyclists from riding alongside leashed pets.

"There's nothing," he said. "Nobody's ever heard of this happening before. Whatever we do, we'll be breaking ground on this issue."

Cicirelli said his first thought is not to ban bicyclists from riding with their pets, per se.

Rather, he says it might be better to beef up the current leash laws mandating that owners must not only keep their dog under control, but extend that responsibility to the leash, too.

He quickly added, though, that because there is no law that he can find on the topic, he's open to all ideas.

And there are plenty of ideas percolating out there — especially from the Los Alamitos Creek trail where a white memorial cross now marks the spot where Head hit her head. She was bleeding but conscious after the fall, and even spoke with the bicyclist who stayed until paramedics came. But she died at the hospital the next day, and the bicyclist, whose name is unknown, isn't considered a suspect because police have ruled the death an accident.

Advertisement



GET MOVIES DELIVERED

With BLOCKBUSTER Online®, you get:

- Over 90,000 titles
- Discounts on DVD and game purchases from blockbuster.com
- FREE in-store DVD exchanges (depending on plan)
- No due dates or late fees

[Free Trial at MovieRentalValues.com](http://MovieRentalValues.com)



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

"No little doggies should be tied up to bicycles," said Marilyn Holmes, 60, who walks the trails and plans to attend the meeting. "I want designated lanes for bicycles only. No doggies. Anyone who is caught should be fined."

consider writing stricter dog leash laws is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Almaden Community Center, 6445 Camden Ave., in San Jose.

But while fines and enforcement may sound good, would they really be effective?

Cliff Reyda, 65, who was out walking on the trail recently, isn't so sure.

"People who walk their dogs on leashes can have this happen, too," he said. "There's no real solution. If you enact a law, then all of a sudden, it becomes an anti-dog position."

Al Nolan, 59, isn't anti-anything, but he does want stricter separation on the path between slower walkers like himself and speedy bicyclists.

"They need a dedicated bike run, like a carpool lane," he said, just as a mountain biker whizzed by him and his dog, Indi.

Then there's trail users like Terri Gong, who is out often enough with her mutt, Coco, that she could recognize both Beverly Head and the cyclist in question.

She usually doesn't like when government intervenes in the lives of ordinary citizens. But in this case, she said, there's a need for it.

"I'm darn near a Libertarian," Gong said. "But at the very least, bikers should have their dogs on the right."

Contact Lisa Fernandez at 408-920-5002.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

The meeting to discuss whether the city should

Advertisement

don't delay
get proven, proactive
identity theft protection
CALL NOW



LifeLock.
#1 In Identity Theft Protection™

1-888-896-1878

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™