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## Community debates whether San Jose needs stronger dog leash laws

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Posted: 10/28/2009 10:06:35 PM PDT

Updated: 10/29/2009 03:07:20 AM PDT

### Have Your Say!

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

Whether San Jose needs more rules governing bicyclists riding with dogs on trails became the focal point of a Wednesday night community meeting called after the bizarre death of a woman caught in a dog leash on a popular San Jose trail.

"This is a horribly tragic accident, but we can't legislate accidents," said Justin Grosso, a San Jose resident. Others felt differently: "Rules are made for people who don't have common sense," said Edesa Bitbadal, who favored a strong San Jose law on the issue.

Wednesday's meeting at the Almaden Community Center was sparked by the death of Beverly Head, who fell and hit her head after her legs became wrapped up in the leash of a Siberian husky being towed by a cyclist along the popular Los Alamitos Creek trail.

Head, a 62-year-old phlebotomist

Head, a 62-year-old phlebotomist, initially remained conscious after the Sept. 16 fall, even

speaking with the bicyclist, who stayed until paramedics came and transported her to the hospital. But she died the next day.

The bicyclist — who was riding with two Siberian huskies — has not come forward even though the death has been ruled an accident. The Head family, meanwhile, is offering a \$5,000 reward for his identity.

"We have tried to rely on this person's principles and hoped he would come forth," Head's husband, Bob, said in a statement, describing the cyclist's actions as reckless and out of control. "For any law to succeed, either the existing laws or new ones . . . people must be held accountable for their actions."

San Jose Councilwoman Nancy Pyle, who convened the meeting attended by about 125 people, is studying whether the current trail safety laws are sufficient. Current code mandates that owners keep their dogs "under control" at all times and keep them on leashes of up to 20 feet in city parks.

"We are not in the business of coming up with a million rules," said Pyle, whose office has been inundated with calls and e-mails about the issue.

"We're here to get ideas from the public so that shared trails don't become hazardous, and we can find ways to coexist."

If San Jose ultimately adopts a law on cyclists and dogs on trails, it would be the first city in the nation to do so as there currently are no such laws addressing the issue of bicyclists alongside leashed dogs, according to Jon Cicirelli, deputy director of the city's Animal Care and Services. Cicirelli has suggested a better first step might be to examine and strengthen current leash laws.

"While I don't think people should be on the trail

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walking their dogs, we shouldn't have to have any laws," said Jeff Orloff of San Jose. "But for whatever reason, people don't follow common sense."

Suggestions offered at the meeting included adding more signs on the trails, separating trails for walkers and bicyclists, and banning leashes more than 6 feet long. These ideas are being referred to the city's Parks and Recreation Commission for further review and possible recommendation to the City Council.

"When someone dies, it's not just an accident; accidents are just ready to happen there," Elva Juarez of San Jose said at the meeting. "I'm not riding my bike there anymore. It's not worth my life."

Contact Sandra Gonzales at 408-920-5778.

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