

LOCAL

No license, no problem: More cities eliminating pet licenses

Growing number of cities in the metro area are eliminating the requirement

By Erin Adler (<http://www.startribune.com/erin-adler/195633361/>) Star Tribune |

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From Burnsville to Crystal, many cities in the metro area no longer require residents to obtain pet licenses, calling the practice out-of-touch in an age when rabid dogs rarely roam and people have other ways to find their missing pets.

"What I've seen is some cities finding it is more of a headache ... than it is a benefit," said Graham Brayshaw, head veterinarian for the Animal Humane Society in Golden Valley.

The latest municipalities to drop pet licenses include Mound, in 2016, and Orono, in 2017. The Crystal City Council in August informally decided to end licensing, and Burnsville officials agreed to do so at a work session last month (but likely won't vote on it until next year).



The main reason, say city officials, is mass noncompliance. Few pet owners keep licenses up to date, if they get them at all.

"We're only penalizing people who are rule followers," said Jeff Kolb, a Crystal City Council member, adding that those individuals probably already are responsible pet owners.

Pet licenses once purported to ensure that animals were vaccinated and could be easily reunited with their owners if lost. Yet, out of 8,000 households, only a few hundred Crystal residents have licenses. The fees probably don't even cover administration costs, Kolb said.

"We're not out there enforcing," said Catherine Pausche, Mound city finance director.

Orono Police Chief Correy Farniok said that social media and microchips combine to make a highly effective way to locate lost pets, recalling a Facebook post by an officer on a missing dog that was shared 4,000 times in an hour.

Ideas about pets have changed, said Burnsville City Council Member Cara Schulz. People used to keep them outside, let them run loose and brought them to the vet only rarely.

"Now your pets sleep on the bed with you," she said.

Some cities say that licenses still serve a purpose. Minneapolis' website highlights the revenue they generate, which pays for the sheltering and feeding of lost pets.

GALLERY GRID 1/6



DAVID JOLIS - STAR TRIBUNE
 Gallery: A young golden retriever pup seemed a bit spooked by a small dog that had come to mingle at Alimagnet dog park Friday, Nov. 2, 2018, in



DAVID JOLIS • STAR TRIBUNE

Smaller dogs bounded toward a fence at Alimagnet Dog Park in Burnsville on Friday to check out a passing Doberman pinscher on the

Changing practices

The practice of licensing pets emerged in the 1950s in rural areas as a way to figure out who they belonged to, Schulz said. During a rabies scare in the 1970s, licenses were a means to show that the pets were up-to-date on vaccinations.

Minnesota law doesn't require cities to license pets. That's up to municipalities, which can enact ordinances specifying who must get a license, for what period and for how much.

Some cities require dogs, cats and other small pets to be licensed, while others license only dogs. Delano charges nothing for a license, while Minneapolis charges \$75 to license an unsterilized pet.

While some cities, like Bloomington, offer lifetime licenses with a one-time fee, others want residents to renew every year or two.

But Kevin Toskey, a research attorney for the League of Minnesota Cities, said there was "definitely a trend happening with [cities] not enforcing or repealing pet licensing."

There are a variety of reasons. Technology, including dog facial recognition software and microchips, is changing how we find lost animals, said Brayshaw. Microchips are now implanted between the shoulder blades of every dog at the Animal Humane Society and by many rescue organizations.

About a third of the pets belonging to the 85 million U.S. pet-owning households are microchipped, said Kate Vossen, a spokeswoman for HomeAgain, a popular microchip company. HomeAgain has reunited more than 2 million pets with their owners, she said.

City officials and experts said having pets wear a collar with identification and vaccination tags is still the most effective way to bring them home.

As for vaccinations, rabies is far less common today than in the past, Schulz said. Owners already must present vet records to take out pet insurance or enroll in doggy day care. Farniok said that when a dog bite is reported, police go directly to the owner to ask about vaccinations rather than checking city records.

Making a statement

The Minneapolis city website says that if pets are licensed, they are three times more likely to be returned if missing. In some cities, licensing fees help offset the costs of dog parks, and a license is needed to visit them.

Not every pet has a microchip, and microchips aren't infallible, Brayshaw said. He added that "dead-end" microchips, which lack current contact information for owners, are common.

Brayshaw said there are more important animal issues to focus on than licensing, though he wondered if licensure and vaccination might be more effective if mandated by counties or states rather than cities.

Few suburban pet owners recently interviewed said they had pet licenses. Some said they didn't know they existed, and others didn't see the point.

Lisa Bernier-Perleberg said she's lived in Crystal for 16 years but never purchased a license for her pets. "We always figured if we did get caught, it would be easier to just pay a fine," she said.

As her two Jack Russell terrier mixes, Fred and Wilma, frolicked at Burnsville's Alimagnet Dog Park, Mary Dean said she thought a dog license was "more paperwork than it's worth." Dean, of Apple Valley, said she might change her mind if license revenue went to animal shelters.

A few pet enthusiasts said there might be value in licensing pets. Amanda Waltz said she went 13 years without getting a dog license, but she wondered if having one would have helped when her dog nipped a kid on a bike.

"Perhaps if licensed, [the dog] wouldn't have been slapped with a potentially dangerous animal label," said Waltz, of Crystal.

Kurt Martinson of Burnsville has a license for his mini Labradoodle, Wilma.

"I'm kind of civic-minded," he said. "If you're going to take on the responsibility of a dog, \$10 isn't a big deal. It makes a statement."

Erin Adler is a suburban reporter covering Dakota County for the Star Tribune, working breaking news shifts on Sundays. She previously spent three years covering K-12 education in the south metro and five months covering Carver County.

Erin.Adler@startribune.com 612-673-1781 erinStrib