



BUSINESS OF THE CITY COUNCIL CITY OF MERCER ISLAND

AB 6985
September 15, 2026
Regular Business

AGENDA BILL INFORMATION

TITLE:	AB 6985: Updating the City's Animal Control Code	☒ Discussion Only ☐ Action Needed: ☐ Motion ☐ Ordinance ☐ Resolution
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Provide feedback to staff on proposed changes to the Animal Control Code.	

DEPARTMENT:	City Manager
STAFF:	Robbie Cunningham Adams, Senior Management Analyst Mike Seifert, Police Commander Bio Park, City Attorney
COUNCIL LIAISON:	n/a
EXHIBITS:	1. 2018 Regional Animal Services Interlocal Agreement 2. Draft Animal Control Code Ordinance
CITY COUNCIL PRIORITY:	n/a

AMOUNT OF EXPENDITURE	\$ n/a
AMOUNT BUDGETED	\$ n/a
APPROPRIATION REQUIRED	\$ n/a

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this agenda item is to receive feedback from the City Council on proposed changes to the City's Animal Control Code, which are required to comply with the City's interlocal agreement with the Regional Animal Services of King County (RASKC) for animal licensing and control services.

- The City of Mercer Island receives animal licensing and control services from King County through the Regional Animal Services of King County (RASKC) interlocal agreement (ILA). The current ILA with RASKC is attached as Exhibit 1 and is in effect until December 31, 2027.
- Per the adopted ILA with RASKC, the City is obligated to "enact an ordinance or resolution that includes license, fee, penalty, enforcement, appeal, impound/redemption and sheltering provisions that are substantially the same as those of Title 11 King County Code as now in effect or hereafter amended."
- In 2023, the [King County Council adopted, updated, and reorganized their animal control code](#). See [Title 11 of King County Code](#).
- Regulations pertaining to animals within Mercer Island is governed by [MICC Chapter 7.04 – Animal Code](#).
- Mercer Island's animal code needs to be amended to align with King County's 2023 update to KCC Title 11, per the requirements of the ILA.

- The proposed revisions to the City Code are included in Exhibit 2 and address minor inconsistencies in phrasing of definitions and policies. The more substantive updates include changes to dangerous animal appeal hearings, pet licensing requirements, and additional animal protection requirements. City Council feedback will be used to finalize the ordinance and present it for a first reading later this year.

BACKGROUND

Interlocal Agreement with Regional Animal Services of King County

The City of Mercer Island receives animal licensing and control services from King County through the Regional Animal Services of King County (RASKC) interlocal agreement (ILA) that was last updated and adopted by the City in 2018 ([AB 5238](#)). The current ILA with RASKC is attached as Exhibit 1 and is in effect until December 31, 2027.

Mercer Island and 24 other cities contract with King County for regional animal services, which include animal control, shelter care, adoption, and pet licensing services. Under the terms of the ILA the City assists the County by informing residents about animal code requirements and provides pet license applications at the Community Center front desk.

Revenues and Costs Related to Animal Control and RASKC ILA

King County's Regional Animal Services provide a cost-effective solution for cities that would otherwise need to operate their own animal services programs. Costs are allocated among participating RASKC cities and unincorporated King County based on usage (80 percent) and population (20 percent). Costs to the City of Mercer Island are offset by pet licensing revenue collected from Mercer Island residents. The City pays the remaining costs for animal control services.

Additionally, while the services provided under the RASKC ILA include administering appeals of dangerous dog designations under the King County Hearing Examiner, Mercer Island code currently requires that the City is responsible for administering dangerous dog appeals with the City's own hearing examiner rather than the King County hearing examiner. This means costs related to these appeals are currently borne by the City. This is one area that is recommended to be changed.

Table 1 shows revenue and expenses related to pet licensing revenue, costs of the RASKC ILA, Mercer Island Hearing Examiner costs, and costs related to outside legal support services for dangerous dog appeal cases. Pet license revenue goes directly to King County. Costs net of the pet license revenue is paid for by the City General Fund. Pet license revenue does not cover all of the City's costs related to the ILA and hearing examiner costs.

Table 1.

Description	2024 Actuals	2025 Actuals
Revenues		
King County Pet Licenses	\$ 66,800	\$ 63,500
Expenses		
RASKC Interlocal Agreement	73,000	77,100
Hearing Examiner (<i>dangerous dog appeals</i>)	600	9,600
Outside Legal	14,400	61,500
Expenses Subtotal	\$ 88,000	\$ 148,200
Net Cost to City General Fund	\$ 21,200	\$ 84,700

ISSUE/DISCUSSION

Regulations pertaining to animals within Mercer Island is governed by [MICC Chapter 7.04 – Animal Code](#). This chapter covers pet dog licensing and tag/collar requirements, unlawful conduct of pets, designation of off-leash areas, and policies and procedures related to regulating dangerous and potentially dangerous dogs. The chapter additionally adopts several state codes related to animals and livestock.

Per the adopted ILA with RASKC, the City is obligated to “enact an ordinance or resolution that includes license, fee, penalty, enforcement, appeal, impound/redemption and sheltering provisions that are substantially the same as those of [Title 11 King County Code](#) as now in effect or hereafter amended”.

In 2023, the [King County Council adopted and updated and reorganized animal control code](#). The changes updated the code to reflect current state law and included a substantial update of the process and procedures for declaring dogs to be “potentially dangerous” and the due process appeal protections. Mercer Island’s code needs to be updated to align with King County’s 2023 update to KCC Title 11, per the requirements of the ILA, and to address discrepancies between the County’s and City’s codes that make it more difficult for the County to enforce animal care and control laws in the City of Mercer Island.

Impact of Updating City Animal Control Code to Align with King County Animal Control Code

Staff recommend adopting the King County animal control code by reference. This is the approach most commonly used by cities that contract with RASKC. RASKC will continue to be the primary body enforcing animal control on Mercer Island, with assistance from the Mercer Island Police Department as appropriate. Additionally, staff recommend several changes and additions to modernize and clarify areas of the City animal code.

King County requires that City’s animal control code be “substantially the same” on the policies related to licensing, fees, penalties, enforcement, appeals, impound/redemption and sheltering provisions. The City may continue to establish local policies on matters outside these areas, including off-leash areas and Mercer Island-specific conduct requirements.

The code sections requiring substantive change are summarized below and reflected in the draft ordinance (Exhibit 2). Additional minor revisions are proposed to address inconsistencies in phrasing of definitions and policies.

Dangerous and Potentially Dangerous Animal Framework

Chapter 7.04 MICC was last updated in 2021 to include provisions for determining and declaring an animal to be a potentially dangerous dog and establishing a method for appeals of decisions by the City relating to potentially dangerous dogs and dangerous dogs ([AB 5939](#)). City code currently requires that these appeals be heard by the City's Hearing Examiner, and this cost is paid by the City. This practice is not in alignment with the King County code.

The processing of dangerous and potentially dangerous animals is a core function of RASKC; therefore it is recommended that the City Code be amended to align with the King County Code. Proposed changes include clarifying the process and procedures on enforcement powers, including all species (not just dogs as is in current City code), requiring the registration of potentially dangerous animals, requiring liability insurance for dangerous dogs, and requiring dangerous animals to be spayed or neutered. Consistency with County code will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of RASKC administering dangerous and potentially dangerous animals.

Transferring Appeal Process from City Hearing Examiner to RASKC

The City Manager is recommending transferring the appeals for dangerous or potentially dangerous animals from the City Hearing Examiner to RASKC. Under the current ILA with RASKC, the County is authorized to administer the appeals at no additional cost to the City. This change would eliminate Hearing Examiner costs and reduce the administrative resources associated with processing appeals. The City handling appeals on our own also requires significant staff time that would not be necessary when using the County process. Finally, using the countywide process likely improves efficiency for RASKC staff, who are more familiar with the County Hearing Examiner process than the City's.

Pet Licensing Provisions

Mercer Island is the only RASKC contract city that requires the licensing of dogs and not cats. Staff are seeking policy direction from the City Council on whether to add a requirement for pet cats to be licensed.

Requiring the licensing of cats may bring in additional pet license revenue, which may reduce or eliminate the gap between RASKC ILA expenses and pet license revenue. This would potentially reduce or eliminate the need for general fund dollars to be used to fully fund animal control services. However, requiring the licensing of cats would increase annual license fees required of Mercer Island cat owners. Annual licensing for cats ranges from \$15 - \$60 depending on the age and condition of the animal and any eligibility for discounts of the human applicant. Requiring the licensing of cats would require a joint City/RASKC communication campaign to update Islanders of the new requirements.

Additionally, a pet license identifies and helps reunite lost cats with their owners. Licensed cats gain access to additional services and benefits from RASKC (e.g. first free ride home if lost, longer care period when found, vacation pet alert, etc.). There is also a fine for an animal control found unlicensed pet, \$125 for an altered cat or dog or \$250 for an unaltered pet. Additional information about pet licensing costs and benefits is on the [RASKC website](#).

Adequate Care

The 2023 King County Code update added a new definition for "adequate care" for animals. To ensure alignment with the County, this change is proposed in the draft ordinance (Exhibit 2). This new definition addresses the basic requirements of caring for an animal such as providing access to species appropriate and

sufficient food, reasonable weather resistant housing structure(s) with proper bedding, and regular or emergency care from a veterinarian. Aligning City code with this is required under the RASKC ILA, in addition to promoting the welfare of animals.

Exotic Animal Definition and Possession

The 2023 King County Code update added a new definition for “exotic animal” that includes species capable of inflicting serious harm or death to human beings, primates, bears, non-domesticated feline or canine species, and species within the order Crocodylia (e.g., alligators, crocodiles, caimans, etc.). Possession of exotic animals as pets would be prohibited. The updated definition is included in the draft ordinance. Aligning City code with this is required under the RASKC ILA, in addition to promoting public safety and the protection of these animal species.

Required Quarantine of Biting Animal

MICC 7.04.210 contains a requirement for the owner of any animal that is found to have bitten any person that causes an abrasion of the skin, to both contain and keep possession of said animal for ten days to test for potential rabies exposure. This provision does not exist in the King County Code. The proposed ordinance retains this provision in City Code with minor revisions that improve clarity.

Definition of “Under Control”

The City Manager recommends updating the City Code with the King County definition of “under control”. The County code addresses the original intent of the City definitions, and alignment with County code makes it easier for RASKC animal control officers to effectively enforce animal conduct rules on Mercer Island.

Current Mercer Island City Code “under control” and “under voice and/or signal control” definitions:

“Under Control” means the animal is on a leash or under voice and/or signal control so as to be thereby restrained from approaching any bystander or other animal or from causing or being the cause of physical or property damage when off a leash or off the premises of the owner. The animal is not under control if it charges, chases, jumps on, or displays aggression toward other people or animals, or behaves in a way that any reasonable person would find disturbing.

“Under voice and/or signal control” means the immediate recall of an animal to the person in control of the animal when signaled or called. To be under effective voice and/or signal control, the animal must be within the sight of the person in control.

King County Title 11 “under control” definition:

“Under control” means a domesticated animal is restrained, by a human using a leash or competent and effective voice or signal control, from approaching any bystander or other domesticated animal and from causing property damage.

Staff are seeking feedback from the City Council on the proposed changes to the animal control code and will use that to inform revisions to the ordinance.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will make necessary revisions to the draft ordinance and return for a first reading. This work is intended to be completed by the end of the year.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Provide feedback to staff on proposed changes to the City's Animal Control Code.