

To: Finance Committee
From: Mark Stevens
Date: February 10, 2024
RE: Dog Licensing Fees and Procedures

Staff in the Finance Department issue dog licenses to City residents continually throughout the year, with most licenses being issued in the month of December for the following licensing year.

DOG LICENSING FEES

State of Wisconsin statute 174.05 (Dog License Tax) dictates the minimum dog license tax for an unaltered dog is \$8.00 and \$3.00 for an altered dog, or ½ of those amounts if the dog becomes 5 months of age after July 1st of the licensing year. Chapter 228 of the Watertown Municipal Ordinances outlines the requirements for dog licensing, where the City's imposed tax to citizens is outlined in the current Fee Schedule as follows:

- Unaltered Dog: \$10.00
- Altered Dog: \$5.00
- Late Fee: \$5.00
- Replacement Tag: \$2.00
- Certified Service Dog: \$0.00
- ½ price if dog becomes 5 months of age after July 1st

Late fees are assessed if one of the following applies:

- Regular renewals that occur on or after April 1st of each year
- Renewals where license has lapsed 1 or more licensing year
- New licenses issued more than 30 days after becoming a City resident or after vaccination for rabies

A review of other municipality dog licensing fees shows the City's fee structure is outdated and in need of revision. The graphic below shows the City's fees are noticeably under the calculated average of other municipalities.

LOCAL COMPARABLES (WITHIN 20 MILES OF WATERTOWN)

MUNICIPALITY	EST. POPULATION	ALTERED	UNALTERED	LATE FEE
City of Beaver Dam	16,647	7.00	19.00	10.00
City of Columbus	5,505	15.00	30.00	15.00
City of Deerfield	2,508	20.00	25.00	5.00
City of Fort Atkinson	12,489	10.00	15.00	10.00
City of Hartford	15,747	10.00	20.00	5.00
City of Horicon	3,800	10.00	30.00	10.00
City of Jefferson	7,753	11.00	16.00	10.00
City of Juneau	2,665	10.00	15.00	25.00
City of Lake Mills	6,433	10.00	15.00	5.00
City of Marshall	3,823	20.00	25.00	5.00
City of Oconomowoc	16,847	10.00	15.00	
City of Waterloo	3,479	11.00	15.00	10.00
Town of Hustisford	1,379	10.00	15.00	
Town of Ixonia	4,562	10.00	15.00	5.00
Town of Watertown	1,954	5.00	10.00	5.00
Village of Johnson Creek	3,406	10.00	15.00	25.00
AVERAGE FEES		11.00	18.00	10.00

	Altered	Unaltered
MIN	5.00	10.00
MAX	25.00	30.00

Out of 21 municipalities listed, 11 assess \$10.00 for altered dogs and 10 assess \$15.00 for unaltered dogs.

POPULATION COMPARABLES

MUNICIPALITY	EST. POPULATION	ALTERED	UNALTERED	LATE FEE
City of Germantown	20,885	8.00	13.00	5.00
City of Pleasant Prairie	21,373	15.00	20.00	5.00
City of Middleton	21,864	25.00	25.00	
City of Muskego	25,073	10.00	15.00	
City of Mequon	25,102	10.00	15.00	5.00
AVERAGE FEES		14.00	18.00	5.00

In addition, because the City sells dog licenses on behalf of Dodge and Jefferson Counties, we remit a fixed dollar amount per license sold to each County on a bi-monthly basis. After September 1st each year, we submit the total number of licenses sold to each County, who then remits a fixed dollar amount per license back to the City. Below are the fixed dollar amounts per County:

Jefferson County	
Unaltered	\$ 7.75
Altered	\$ 2.75
September 1st	\$ 1.50

Dodge County	
Unaltered	\$ 7.50
Altered	\$ 2.50
September 1st	\$ 0.50

In 2023, we collected an estimated \$8,400 in dog license fees; \$5,100 was remitted to the County (about 60%). We anticipate approximately \$1,530 to be returned to us, yielding a net revenue of \$4,830. Using 2023 numbers, the below chart calculates the potential increases in revenue if we were to raise the cost of dog licenses. (The fixed dollar amounts charged by the County will not change if we were to raise the dog license charge.)

CURRENT FEES				
		Fee	Total	
Unaltered Dogs	260	10.00	\$ 2,600	
Altered Dogs	1173	5.00	\$ 5,865	
INCREASE \$5 PER LICENSE				
		Fee	Total	Increase
Unaltered Dogs	260	15.00	\$ 3,900	\$ 1,300
Altered Dogs	1173	10.00	\$ 11,730	\$ 5,865
INCREASE UP TO LOCAL AVERAGE				
		Fee	Total	Increase
Unaltered Dogs	260	18.00	\$ 4,680	\$ 2,080
Altered Dogs	1173	11.00	\$ 12,903	\$ 7,038

CURRENT DOG LICENSING PROCEDURES

The staff in the Finance Department, in practice, have not been charging the ½ price amounts if a dog becomes 5 months of age after July 1st as our ordinance states. Rather, we've been charging the full license fee for all new dogs according to their altered status throughout the year.

In addition, staff have allowed service dogs to be licensed free of charge if the owner were to produce certification the dog is specially trained as a service dog, regardless of what service they provide to the owner. If owners are unable to provide certification documentation, the regular fee applies.



RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the licensing fees be increased at least \$5 per unaltered and altered license. This modification will align us with neighboring communities while providing the City with an increase in revenue for dog licenses. It is also recommended that we strike the ½ price dog license provision to follow our practice.

After surveying a few neighboring municipalities, we found an inconsistent assortment of procedures pertaining to service dog requirements and fee structure. We ask the assistance of this committee to determine what free licensing the City should consider providing for a service or “comfort” dog with the understanding that the counties have no fee waivers.

- Option 1: Follow the State Statute – **Service dogs** will receive a free dog license with certification of special training, provided annually, to assist their **deaf, blind, or mobility impaired** owner.
- Option 2: Expand upon State Statute – **Service dogs** will receive a free dog license with certification of special training, provided annually, to assist their owner **with any medical needs** (Examples: diabetic alert, allergy detection, seizure response, etc). [Current practice in Watertown]
- Option 3: Expand upon State Statute to include **Emotional Support Animals** (ESAs) – Service dogs and ESA’s (comfort/companion) will receive a free dog license with certification of special training or documentation from a licensed medical professional, provided annually, to assist their owner (Examples: psychiatric assistance, PTSD, mood disorders, etc).