

Town Passes Stray Cat Ownership Law

New rule makes people who feed strays responsible for them.

The mayor and council in the township of Vernon, N.J., have passed a law decreeing that people who feed stray cats can be considered the cats owner and held responsible.

The new ordinance replaces an old law, under which animal control officers could be summoned to collect cats that strayed off their owners premises, even if people knew to whom they belonged.

Now, only cats lacking known owners, caregivers or places of shelter will be considered public nuisances, even if they have not committed any offenses.

Under the new law, both owned and ownerless cats that bite, scratch or harm townspeople or trespass upon and damage property could be impounded and disposed.

The council voted unanimously in favor of the ordinance on Wednesday, July 27.

Township Attorney Joseph Ragno, owner of two cats, has said that choosing to feed and shelter a cat is a matter of free will and if residents are feeding and sheltering cats they don't wish to be responsible for, they should cease and call animal control to collect them.

Cat advocates have said that the ordinance falls short of the mark and have suggested that Vernon officials explore adding a licensing requirement for owned cats and study-approved programs for managing feral cat populations.

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