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Cat policy

Inman cat ordinance likely to bring out disagreements

A new ordinance regulating cats in Inman is likely to breed enmity between neighbors in the small community.

Mayor John O'Brien has said the law will need citizen participation to succeed, and by "citizen participation" he means neighbors reporting neighbors.

A cat policy is not out of line in its own right. McPherson also is considering a law regulating cats Monday, and there has been some talk about Hutchinson taking up the issue as well.

But Inman's approach to concerns raised about stray cats is not ideal.

First, not all residents were aware the city council was considering a cat ordinance. In a community this small, there is really no excuse for anyone being in the dark.

Secondly, the policy supposedly was set up in response to concerns about strays, but many of the regulations apply to pet cats. For example, the ordinance requires all cats to be licensed and vaccinated for rabies, and allows a citizen to have no more than three cats. It also requires cat owners to keep their cats from running at large. Anyone with a cat knows this means owners are required to keep their cats inside only; there is no fencing in a feline.

Most of these requirements are reasonable, although some might argue about keeping their cats indoors. In any case, residents should have been better informed.

The ordinance does address the stray problem. It prohibits feeding or caring for a feral cat, or leaving garbage cans without proper lids. But try telling an animal lover they cannot leave food out for a starving cat, and your "citizen participation" is not likely to succeed.

On top of the ordinance itself are the fines, relatively steep for a pet violation. Any violation is an unclassified misdemeanor, which carries a fine of \$200, with subsequent convictions costing a minimum of \$500 plus court costs. The court also may impose a 30-

day jail sentence.

But even more steep to pet lovers is the cost the cat could pay. If a pet cat is impounded, owners have three days to claim it before it is destroyed. Claiming the cat carries a \$50 impound fee plus \$20 for each day the cat was impounded.

Now, no doubt the Inman council had good intentions. Residents raised concerns about strays, and the Inman council responded.

But council members seem to have strayed a bit too far afield. Any law so dependent on its citizens to report violators is a breeding ground for bitter disagreements between neighbors and friends.

Inman should revisit the ordinance and try to measure the pulse of the community. Look for ways to address the stray cat concern, and reasonably regulate pet cats, while making sure the consequences match the crime.