

Portland to consider anti-cruising law

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● The council also will vote on requiring dogs to be leashed in some parks and cemeteries.

By STEVEN G. VEGH
Staff Writer

Motorists trolling for sex partners in Portland neighborhoods would face fines of up to \$500 under an anti-cruising ordinance the City Council will consider March 4.

The ordinance was presented Wednesday for the first time to the council's Public Safety Committee. The regulation was drafted after West End and Parkside residents complained that drivers cruise their neighborhoods in search of prostitutes or sex partners.

While no other neighborhoods have complained about cruising, committee Chairman Charles W. Harlow said cruising is a controversial and enjoyable issue that needs to be discussed by the public and the

full council. The committee forwarded the ordinance to the council with no recommendation.

Whether and how cruising should be controlled inevitably provokes competing perceptions of how civil rights are affected, Harlow said. "If we do it, pass an ordinance, we violate civil liberties; if we don't, we violate civil liberties," he said in describing the debate.

The ordinance would let police designate no-cruising areas, which would be posted with signs banning cruising.

Cruising would be defined as driving past any site chosen by police three times within two hours. The site would have to be in or next to a no-cruising area.

Exempted from the ban would be taxis, buses, vehicles used for business purposes, ambulances, police and fire vehicles, and cars owned and used by governmental agencies.

A first offense would carry a minimum fine of \$100. The minimum would rise to \$300 for a second

offense, and to \$500 for third and subsequent convictions. Attorneys' fees and court costs also would be paid by the offender.

The Public Safety Committee requested an ordinance last month after criticizing the Police Department's tactic of sending cautionary letters to the owners of cars seen cruising.

Under the ordinance, police could still send such a letter to car owners rather than citing them for a violation.

Only four city residents commented on the ordinance, and none gave outright support to the measure.

Former Mayor Anne Pringle said the ordinance would be a nightmare to enforce, and that the cruising signs would create new headaches.

"How would you feel if you were trying to sell your house and you had no cruising signs in your neighborhood?" she said.

Committee members' only consensus on the ordinance was to send it to the full council with no

recommendation.

The committee also reviewed a proposed tightening of Portland's leash law.

Larry Mead, director of parks and recreation, said the changes are needed to control dogs that are tainting cemeteries, playgrounds, beaches and parks with waste.

There also have been incidents of dogs attacking other dogs and threatening city maintenance workers.

Under the changes, leashes would be required in the city's most heavily used parks. Those parks, which include the Eastern Promenade, Deering Oaks and Payson Park, now let dogs run free if they are under an owner's "voice control." The new requirement would allow leashes as long as 25 feet.

Dogs would be allowed to run freely, but under voice control, at the city's less popular parks. Those include Caprice Pond Park, Riverton Park and Baxter Woods Western Cemetery, which has

become a group romping ground for many dogs, would require a 25-foot leash. The cemetery now requires voice control.

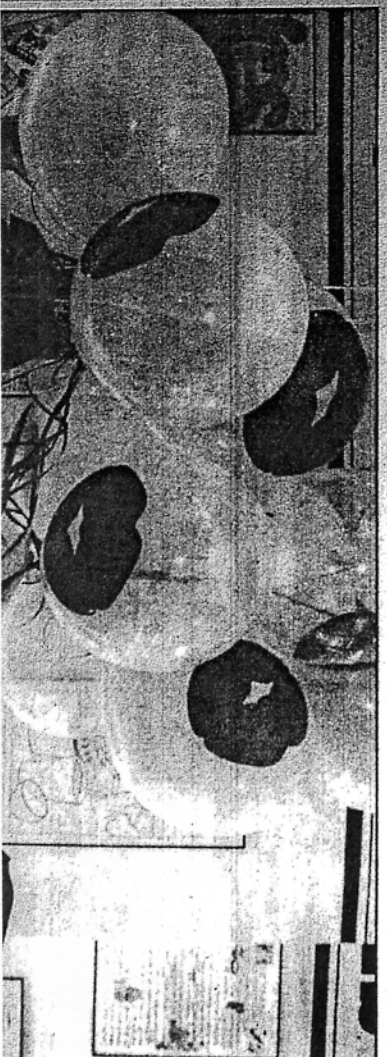
But at least a dozen dog owners told the committee that requiring leashes at the cemetery was unwarranted and would erode an aspect of Portland they treasure.

"The use of the Western Cemetery by dog walkers has created a kind of unique community," said Dick Spencer, a 16-year resident of Bowdon Street. "It's made a real contribution to the life of the city for people who have dogs."

Spencer, whose property overlooks the cemetery, said the dog walkers have displaced other people whose drinking and partying in the cemetery made it a neighborhood nuisance.

The committee responded by endorsing the ordinance but granting the Western Cemetery a nine-month continuance of its voice-control policy. The new leash ordinance will be presented to the full council for action on March 4.

Love, Downtown District style



DA drops theft charge against Topsham activist

From staff reports

TOPSHAM - A theft charge has been dropped against Carol Palesky, the tax activist accused in December of stealing her Mercedes Benz from a car repossession agency in Belgrade.

Kennebec County District Attorney David Crook determined the case to be a civil matter.

Palesky, who was arrested at her home in Topsham the night of Dec. 27, was scheduled to be arraigned

Secretary of State's Office seeking a statewide vote in November on a measure that would cap property taxes at 1 percent of a property's value. The state has until Feb. 29 to certify the petitions.

On Dec. 27, Palesky acknowledges she drove a family car to Secured Creditors Service Inc. the car repossession agency, to retrieve belongings from her 1995 powder white Mercedes Benz. The Mercedes, with a Maine