

History of the "Livestock Running At Large" Ordinance in Bristol

Initial Request (Early-Mid 2024)

The issue was first brought to the Selectboard's attention by Dennis Hysko, who had concerns about his neighbor's horses frequently running at large and onto his property. He requested that the Town develop and adopt an ordinance to control livestock running at large.

July 8, 2024: First Formal Discussion

The Bristol Selectboard formally discussed the development of a Livestock Running at Large Ordinance. The Town Administrator's report noted that New Haven had recently adopted such an ordinance, and the towns of Calais and Waterford also had similar ordinances.

During this meeting:

- Valerie (Town Administrator) reported researching several other towns' ordinances
- Chief Nason (Police Chief) noted that his Department lacked the ability to secure/contain large animals
- Chief Nason recommended that fines should be high enough to be effective, as loose animals can lead to injuries
- Kevin Brown explained the logistics of a ticketing mechanism and jurisdiction for subsequent offenses

July 10, 2024: Draft Development

Following the July 8 meeting, Jessica Teets (Selectboard member) began drafting an ordinance based on examples from other Vermont communities. She sent an email to the Town Administrator with a draft ordinance, noting:

- She followed the same format as other towns but removed most impoundment language
- The draft included a fine structure for repeated violations
- She raised a question about whether additional language regarding repeated violations (similar to Waterford's ordinance) should be included

August-November 2024: Continued Consideration

The ordinance appeared on the Town Administrator's "Upcoming Agenda Items" lists throughout this period:

- August 26, 2024: Listed as "Consider whether to adopt a Livestock Running At Large ordinance"
- October 13, 2024: Listed as "Consider whether to adopt a Livestock Running At Large ordinance (Jessica prepared a draft)"
- October 26, 2024: Same listing as October 13

- November 17, 2024: Listed as "Review and possible adoption of draft Livestock Running At Large ordinance (prepared by Jessica)"

December 2, 2024: Detailed Review

The Selectboard conducted a more thorough review of the draft ordinance. Jessica Teets explained that:

- She had researched and adapted ordinances from surrounding towns
- The draft did not require the Police Department to impound loose livestock
- The fines outlined provided discretion for enforcement officials

The Selectboard discussed several aspects of the draft, including:

- The burden on the Town if an animal is seized
- Enforcement of paying for damages to neighboring properties
- The level of enforcement/determination of remedial actions by the Police Department
- Involvement of the Selectboard in these matters
- How to determine what constitutes adequate fencing
- Authorization of various town officials as livestock control officers

Jessica agreed to make revisions based on the input provided, and it was decided that a legal review should be conducted before adopting a final version.

February 10, 2025: Continued Review

Michelle Perlee reported on Kevin Brown's review of the draft ordinance, noting several aspects that needed additional work:

- The Town has no legal obligation to control or be responsible for large animals
- Statutory definitions should be used where possible
- Impoundment measures and procedures needed to be outlined
- A process for matters to be brought to the Selectboard needed to be included

The Selectboard discussed the pros and cons of enacting this type of ordinance and decided to ask Kevin if there was another way to address the triggering issue of animals roaming from one particular resident's property.

February 12, 2025: Alternatives Considered

Kevin Brown provided information on alternatives to adopting a new ordinance, noting that existing statutory options were not of practical utility:

- 20 V.S.A. §3341 allows for fines of \$3-\$10 for knowingly permitting livestock to run at large on public highways

- 20 V.S.A. §3345 imposes fines of \$2-\$10 for knowingly permitting livestock to go upon others' lands
- 20 V.S.A. §3451 permits impoundment of livestock running at large

Brown noted that these statutes had two main problems: the "knowingly" threshold is easily defeated, and the fine amounts are too low to have any deterrent effect. He suggested that "a simple ad-hoc impoundment process and sanction could be built into an ordinance."

February 24, 2025: Final Documented Discussion

The Selectboard continued its review, with additional input:

- Bruce Nason noted that calls are received regarding chickens, not just large animals
- Kris Perlee explained why these matters cannot be addressed through Zoning ordinances
- The Board recognized that an important aspect of enforcing an ordinance would be ensuring a location is available should an animal need to be impounded
- Jessica agreed to inquire how neighboring towns address impoundment
- The Board agreed that the draft ordinance needed more detail in outlining various enforcement processes

Content of the Draft Ordinance

The draft ordinance included several key components:

1. Purpose and Authority: Establishing that livestock running at large causes damage to private property, presents danger to motorists and the public, and may transmit diseases to properly contained livestock.
2. Definitions: Including terms such as "Enforcement Officer," "Livestock," "Owner," "Remedial Action," and "Running at Large."
3. Prohibition: Stating that owners shall not allow livestock to run at large, with an exception for situations where owners have taken reasonable containment measures and animals accidentally escape.
4. Civil Penalties: Establishing a graduated fine structure:
 - First Offense: \$160 civil penalty/\$100 waiver fee
 - Second Offense: \$320 civil penalty/\$250 waiver fee
 - Third Offense: \$480 civil penalty/\$400 waiver fee
 - Fourth Offense: \$640 civil penalty/\$550 waiver fee
 - Fifth and Subsequent Offenses: \$800 civil penalty/\$700 waiver fee
5. Remedial Action: Outlining procedures for notification, correction, inspection, and handling of unclaimed livestock.

As of the last document dated February 24, 2025, the ordinance was still under review and had not yet been adopted.

Local Minutes can make mistakes. Please verify all information using the original documents.