
Town Office, 227 Justin Morrill Highway, Strafford Vermont 05072

Special meeting: Vicious Dog Hearing

Selectboard Members in Person: Toni Pippy, Jeff Solsaa, Andrew Duncklee (Two members of the Selectboard recused themselves from the hearing - see attachment A, below - leaving three to deliberate)

Assistant in attendance: Chris Behr

Participants in Person:

- Courtney Hardy - Dog Officer
- Kelly Harman - South Strafford resident and witness
- Maryanne Biggar - South Strafford resident and witness
- Dan Deneen - Sharon resident and dog owner

Participants via Zoom:

- Mark Black - Person reporting attack and Victim
- John Freitag

Meeting started at 6:00 PM

Toni Pippy referred to the Strafford Dog Ordinance and the Selectboard code of conduct, and read the hearing's notice:

The Selectboard of the Town of Strafford, Vermont, will hold a Public Hearing pursuant to 20 V.S.A. § 3546 on November 11, 2025 at 6:00 pm in The Town Office in Strafford, Vermont to hear evidence and receive testimony on a complaint of a "vicious" concerning a dog named Obi owned by Dan Deneen presently residing at 115 Hillinger Lane, Sharon, VT 05065.

Followed by the definition of "vicious dog" from the Town Dog Ordinance:

"Vicious dog" means a dog that attacks any person or causes any person to reasonably fear attack or bodily injury from such animal, unless the person is trespassing on the property of the owner of the animal. The term shall also mean any animal that, while running at large, attacks another domestic pet or domestic animal, as defined in 20 V.S.A. § 3541.

Toni mentioned that it may be shocking to hear a dog categorized as "vicious" but is the term used by the State as defined above.

Toni continued with the text from the Vicious Dog Complaint Form (see Attachment B, below), that, at 2:30 PM, on November 2, 2025, at the Strafford Pickle ball court, Mark Black, of 30 Stage Rd, South Strafford, was the victim of an unprovoked attack by Dan Deenen's dog "Obi", an Aussie shepherd, resulting in a wound 4" x 2" 1/4 inch deep on his right leg.

Toni opened the hearing for remarks, first from Mark Black, who was not present at that time.

Next, Toni swore in Dan Deenen, who reported:

He was present at the pickle ball court with his dog Obi. While Dan had his back turned when he learned that Mark was bitten. Mark pulled his trouser leg up and said "Your dog bit me". Seeing a lot of blood, Dan asked "Did Obi do that?". Mark replied "No, that's just a wound I have". Dan thought that the bite wound was at the back of Mark's leg, not the part that was bleeding. Mark waved off offers for help and left the court.

Dan had no news until later in the week when he learned that a complaint was filed.

Jeff Solsaa asked if Mark was bleeding during the pickle ball game. Dan replied "Not that I saw"

Dan continued:

Obi is an Australian shepherd and likes to keep things in line. Obi nips often, without causing injury, people don't like it, it's just a bruise at worst. Dan has had Obi for 4 years. Obi is gentle with kids - he goes on school trips without any issues.

(around this time, Mark Black joined via zoom)

"Whatever happened... it was hurtful to my friend Mark", Dan continued, and stated that he was regretful and "...confused because it was not clear...". and explained that he understands how dogs can be scary to others and he supports and takes seriously any report about hurtful dogs.

Jeff Solsaa stated that when Mark dropped his trouser leg over the bleeding wound and said "I got to take care of this", that sounded like a natural reaction when in shock, to get away and handle the issue.

Andrew Duncklee asked about Obi's training. Dan replied that it was not formal, that there was lots of home training work for several months, which got more serious when Obi was involved with the school trips.

Andrew then asked about Obi's exercise routine. Dan replied that he often goes outside and visits the neighbors by mutual agreement (the neighbors' dogs reciprocate and visit Dan). Apart from running free, Obi walks with Dan who enjoys hiking.

Toni Pippy then swore in Mark Black, who stated:

He was playing pickle ball with the dog on the court, when the dog attacked and "ripped a hole in my leg". Mark did not know how bad it was until a nurse took care of it and reported the dimensions mentioned in the Complaint. Obi "has a vicious side" Mark walked toward Obi in a normal way. The bite went into a healing dermatology wound. The nurse who cared for it did not charge.

As there were no further questions, Toni Pippy swore in the first Witness, Kelly Harman, who stated:

Obi had been sitting by the court. When Dan rushed to Mark after the incident, Kelly understood that the wound was in the back of the leg, and then Mark went home. Kelly has known Obi for years as a well behaved dog who attended large gatherings with good behavior.

Toni Pippy mentioned that nips are probably uncomfortable and asked if Obi was leashed. Dan replied he was not, and Toni pointed out that all dogs should be leashed in public places.

Toni swore in the next witness, Maryanne Biggar, who stated that she has been friends with Mark and Dan, hiked with them and Obi, sometimes with lots of people, witnessed no nips, that Obi always came when called, and that Obi was good with children, so she is surprised it's come to this.

Mark Black then clarified that Obi bit the front and the back of his leg, and that the front was the worse.

Toni Pippy stated that a letter was received from Jill LeVine, with testimony in line with Kelly Harman's and Maryanne Biggar's.

Courtney Hardy who was involved with the case on Tuesday (November 4) passed around a photo of the wound.

With two board members recused, the remaining members were now ready to deliberate after last questions and comments.

Dan Deenen stated "If my dog inflicted a 4" wound... it changes all..." because it's not a nip, but Mark said "Obi did not do it".

Jeff Solsaa cautioned about downplaying the size of the wound.

Toni Pippy asked Mark Black why, right after the incident, said he was OK. Mark replied that he was in shock and wanted to go home. Mark added that the hearing should not focus on the size or location of the wound: it was an unprovoked attack followed by a bite, and Dan is in denial about that.

Dan said that he was confused about Mark's comment about him being in denial. Dan said he was puzzled, that the wound is germane to the discussion, and "...if Obi did inflict such a wound...it would be huge..." and then mused about the consequences.

Coutney Hardy was sworn in. She explained that there are dog bite scales; a nip is level 1 to 2. Mark's bite is level 3, maybe 4. The fact that the bite happened on a healing wound does not make it any less serious.

In the absence of further questions or comments, Toni Pippy moved to conclude the hearing. Jeff Solsaa seconded. All approved.

Toni Pippy moved to include Coutney Hardy in the deliberation. Jeff Solsa seconded. All approved.

Toni Pippy moved to move into the private deliberation session. Jeff Solsa seconded. All approved.

Following 20 V.S.A. 3550, the board orders that the dog Obi owned by Dan Deneen, be on leash in public areas, wear a basket muzzle in public areas, attend a minimum of 10 sessions with a certified trainer or until successful completion of behavioral modification and management implementation.

In addition, the following fines in accordance with The Strafford Dog Ordinance are the following:

Section 4. Disturbances & Nuisances, Running at Large: \$30 penalty/\$15 waiver

Section 11. Investigation of Vicious Dogs, Vicious Dog: \$200 penalty/\$100.00 waiver

At 7:03 PM, Toni Pippy moved to end the private deliberation session. Jeff Solsa seconded. All approved, and the meeting ended.

Attachment A - Two board members recuse themselves

*From: **Kelly Harman** <khorman@straffordvt.org>
Date: Thu, Nov 6, 2025 at 10:19 AM
Subject: Re: Vicious Dog Hearing Date and time Jeff and Andrew please respond
To: Toni Pippy <tpippy@straffordvt.org>
Cc: selectboard <selectboard@straffordvt.org>, Courtney Hardy
<chardy@straffordvt.org>, Regina Josler <straffordassistant@straffordvt.org>, Lisa
Bragg <townclerk@straffordvt.org>*

*Thank you.
Please consider this email as notice to recuse myself from the dog bite hearing.*

*From: **Mary Linehan** <mlinehan@straffordvt.org>
Date: Wed, Nov 5, 2025 at 7:56 PM
Subject: Re: Dog bite report
To: Toni Pippy <tpippy@straffordvt.org>, Courtney Hardy <court.calee@gmail.com>*

Trying again.

I recuse myself from the proceedings to avoid any conflict of interest

Mary

Attachment B - Vicious Dog Complaint

TOWN OF STRAFFORD

POST OFFICE BOX 27
STRAFFORD, VT 05072

802-765-4411

TOWN OF STRAFFORD, VT
VICIOUS DOG COMPLAINT FORMTOWNCLERK@STRAFFORDVT.ORG
WWW.STRAFFORDVT.ORGToday's Date: 11/05/25
Attn: Strafford Selectboard & Dog Officer

State law (20 V.S.A. § 3546) requires the selectboard to hold a vicious dog hearing when a domestic pet or wolf-hybrid has bitten a person while the animal is off the premises of its owner or keeper, the person bitten requires medical attention for the attack, and such person files a written complaint with the selectboard. The information submitted on this form will be used to determine whether such a hearing is warranted.

Person Reporting Attack: Mark BlackPhone Number: 802 765 2799Address: 30 Stage RoadTown: S. Strafford State: Vt ZIP: _____The facts of the attack are as follows:Date/Time: Sunday Nov 2 / about 2:30 PMPlace of Attack: Pickle Ball court / StraffordDid the Person Bitten Require Medical Attention? [circle one]: ☒ Yes / NoVictim [name/address]: Mark Black30 Stage Road, S. Strafford

Other facts that may assist the Selectboard in its investigation [e.g. name/address of owner of alleged suspected dog/description of suspected dog/circumstances leading to attack, etc.]:

owner: Dan Deneen (of Sharon)Dog: Aussie Shepard
unprovoked attack, resulting in a wound
4" x 2" 1/4 inch deep on my Right leg

If you need additional space, please attach sheets to this form. Please submit this document and any supporting documentation to the address at the top of this form.