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Town of Shaftsbury

Municipal Offices at Cole Hall

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61 Buck Hill Road

Shaftsbury, VT 05262-0409

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Meeting Minutes for Special Selectboard Meeting/Vicious Dog Hearing

January 13, 2026

At Cole Hall and on Zoom

In attendance: Selectboard Chair, Zoe Contros Kearn, Selectboard Vice Chair, Naomi Miller, Selectboard member, Michael Cichanowski, Paula Iken, Town Administrator, and Bob Perry, Animal Control Officer. Also in attendance: Bethany Murphy, Jason Squires, Melissa Webb/Brown (on Zoom) Marlene Hall (Town Clerk), and various neighbors.

1. Call to Order

Ms. Kearn called the meeting to order at 6:00PM.

2. Notice of Public Hearing

Ms. Kearn read the notice of public hearing, as required by State law 20 VSA 3546. In summation, the hearing document stated the following: Charged is a dog named Gunner, a boxer owned and kept by Melissa Webb/Brown, residing at 887 East Rd. in Shaftsbury. The hearing is open to the public to attend but is not open for public comment. Only those offering evidence in the above stated matter may participate.

3. Complaint

Ms. Kearn read the actual complaint, as required by law. The complaint was filed on January 8, 2026. The incident took place on October 28, 2025. The complainant is Bethany Murphy, who was attacked on property belonging to her boyfriend, Justin Squires, which is located at 1856 Buck Hill Road, in Shaftsbury. The animal is a dark brown boxer weighing approximately 85 pounds, named Gunner, owned by Melissa Webb/Brown, of East Road. The incident was reported to Animal Control Officer, Bob Perry, the day it occurred and to the Town Administrator, Paula Iken, on January 8, 2025, in a written complaint as per direction from Vermont Statute.

4. Procedures

The hearing was conducted per 20 VSA 3564. Ms. Kearn asked that all comments be directed to the Chair of the Selectboard.

5. Testimony

Ms. Kearl administered the oath of testimony to Ms. Murphy. In response to a question from Ms. Kearl, Ms. Murphy said she had no conflicts of interest, nor had she had ex parte communications with any individual on the Selectboard.

Ms. Murphy reported the following: On October 28, 2025, Ms. Murphy was walking on her boyfriend's property with their dogs, to retrieve a tree stand. As they walked back to the house, Gunner approached them, growling. He had a harness and leash attached. At that time, one of Ms. Murphy's dogs ran towards the house, while their other dog was still some distance behind her. Ms. Murphy stopped approximately ten feet away from Gunner and attempted to shoo him back to his home.

As Ms. Murphy and her dog neared Ms. Webb/Brown's property line, Ms. Webb/Brown was already standing on Mr. Squires' property, observing the situation. Ms. Webb/Brown was holding a second dog, a lab, on a leash. When Gunner noticed her, he turned back to Ms. Murphy and bit her right leg. She immediately called 911. While on the phone with emergency services, Gunner continued to attack her, knocking her to the ground. At this point, her dog ran over to her. Gunner then redirected his attack on Ms. Murphy's dog. She pulled the dog underneath her, to protect it, but Gunner grabbed her dog by the neck and began thrashing him, leaving a gash in his neck and backside, which needed stitches.

Ms. Murphy struck Gunner multiple times before he finally released her dog. During this time, Ms. Webb/Brown stood over Ms. Murphy and her dog while Gunner continued attacking Ms. Murphy's dog. Ms. Webb/Brown then released the 2nd dog, thus allowing it to join the attack. Ms. Murphy kicked both dogs away, retrieved her phone from the ground, grabbed her dog, and ran back to the house, while still on the phone with 911.

Throughout the entire incident, Ms. Webb/Brown did not intervene in the attack in any way and had no control over her dogs. Later, Ms. Murphy went to the ER and took her dog to the vet. She required a rabies shot, as there is no proof of Gunner having a rabies vaccine.

Ms. Murphy stated that there have been multiple prior issues involving Ms. Webb/Brown and her dogs, and her dogs have killed over 30 of Ms. Murphy and Mr. Squires' chickens. She states that Ms. Webb/Brown and her dogs have become a nuisance and safety concern to surrounding neighbors and the community.

Various other neighbors also provided testimony about this attack and other incidents they have had with Ms. Webb/Brown's dogs over the course of the past few years.

Ms. Webb/Brown was provided with an opportunity for a rebuttal, and attempted to state her version of the facts, but she was disconnected from her Wi-Fi connection, as she was in transit while on Zoom.

Mr. Chichanowski noted that this was the second Vicious Dog Hearing for Gunner, the first took place in 2023. It can be reasonably assumed that Ms. Webb/Brown did not enforce the

measures required by the Protective Order in that case, as those measures would have made the October 2025 incident improbable.

6. Adjournment

Ms. Kearl stated that the Board is required to make a decision within fifteen days and will notify all parties at that time. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 6:48PM.