

MOUNT LAUREL— A significant increase in fines for pet owners responsible for vicious canines was approved Monday by the Township Council.

The higher penalty was part of an ordinance that tightens the township's municipal code pertaining to dogs and cats. Its passage increases the fee for code violations by 2,000 percent, from \$50 to \$1,000.

Municipal judge will determine whether a dog is labeled vicious or dangerous, Township Solicitor Timothy Prime said. Cases will be referred to the judge from the police.

The approved ordinance also changes language in the code, which officials labeled "outdated." Written in the 1950s, the code applied only to livestock and some pets and did not address behavior that is deemed threatening.

While pets have always required leashes in public places, including streets and parks, the amended code also mandates that animals be in the hands of people capable of leading and controlling them.

The ordinance was crafted at the request of the Police Department. Officials have said past incidents and concerns about possible vicious dogs led to the amendments.