

Free-roaming owned cats in Chapel Hill

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Petition

Prohibit free-roaming **owned** cats within
Chapel Hill town limits

Risks of Free-roaming Cats

- Environment/Wildlife
 - Free-roaming cats in the contiguous U.S. kill 1.3-4.0 billion birds and 6.3-22.3 billion mammals annually.*
 - Excessive nocturnal vocalizations, particularly associated with mating or fighting
- Spread of disease
 - Rabies, Toxoplasmosis, Cat scratch disease
- Threats to the cat itself
 - Motor vehicles, other free-roaming cats, wildlife (i.e., predatory birds, coyotes), loose dogs, animal abusers (i.e., poison, physical harm)
 - Overall shorter lifespan than an indoor cat (2-5 years versus 10-20 years)
- Negative impact on indoor cats
 - Stress, anxiety, aggressive behavior, urine marking, etc.
 - Inappropriate elimination (i.e., urination/defecation outside the litter box) is one of the leading behavioral reasons cats are surrendered to shelters.

Negative Impact on Indoor Cats – Our experience

- Cat approaches windows/doors/screen porch or hides under screen porch and will not leave when my cat “warns”
 - Escalates to screeching and fighting through the glass/screen
 - Awakens us from sleep and requires us to go outside to chase the cat away
- Cat approaches us on our property while we are walking our cat on a harness
 - Escalates to my cat becoming agitated but other cat won’t leave
 - In a frenzied state we have to get our cat inside the house while trying to avoid redirected aggressive behavior
- Exterior property damage
- Urine marking inside the house by my cat
- Has required treatment by a veterinary behaviorist and multiple medications, including treatment of side effects from those medications
- No longer able to walk our cat on our own property
 - Per vet recommendation, we walked our cat in a park driving distance from our house this past February. It resulted in him getting out of his harness and being lost for approximately 17 hours in a drainage pipe. During the effort to find our cat, my husband slipped on a wet rock and fell and broke his hand.
- Alterations to the exterior of our home (i.e., blocking view from windows, foil on window ledge) and our use of our space (i.e., closing off access to porch by a certain time of night)

What happens during one of these incidences?

Yowling, screeching, hissing wakes us up

I try to turn on my phone to get the camera ready while trying to calm down my cat. Simultaneously, my husband is turning off the house alarm, putting on his shoes and a coat and grabbing a flashlight to run outside to chase the cat away.

Once my cat is calm, he needs to be placed in a quiet, closed off room (a "safe space") for 30 minutes to fully calm down.

Within 1-3 days, he will urine mark on or near a door/window inside the house.

Negative Impact on Indoor Cats – Jackson Galaxy

- Jackson Galaxy is a respected cat behaviorist and host of the Animal Planet television series *My Cat from Hell*. He's also published many books about cat behavior and has a private consultation practice. He has over 1.5 million followers on YouTube.
- *My Cat from Hell* episode “Nightmare on Cat Street” (Season 9, Episode 3)
- Short summary clip: <https://youtu.be/BNkxvtgMnjk>

American Veterinary Medical Association Policy

- The AVMA encourages veterinarians to educate clients and the public about the risks associated with allowing cats free-roam access to the outdoors. Keeping owned cats confined, such as housing them in an enriched indoor environment, in an outdoor enclosure, or exercising leash-acclimated cats, can minimize the risks to the cat, wildlife, humans, and the environment.
- Free-roaming cats may have a reduced life span and be exposed to injury, suffering, and death from vehicles; attacks from other animals; euthanasia; human cruelty; poisons; traps; and weather extremes.
- The natural hunting behavior of free-roaming cats results in wildlife species being pursued, injured, and killed. This behavior negatively impacts the prey animal's welfare and may have a negative effect on native wildlife populations and contribute to ecosystem disruption. Free-roaming increases the cat's exposure to infectious, parasitic, and zoonotic disease.

<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/avma-policies/free-roaming-owned-cats>

Current Ordinance – CH Town

- Section 4-4 Responsibility of custodian of animals
 - (a) The custodian of every animal shall be responsible for the care, licensing, vaccination and behavior of such animal.
 - (b) The custodian of every animal shall take whatever action(s) is necessary to insure that the animal not pose a risk to health or safety of the public.
- Section 4-7 Abandonment of animals
 - It shall be unlawful for any person to abandon, drop off or **leave any animal to fend for itself** or to become a nuisance or danger to the public or other animals.
 - *Question:* Does “leave any animal to fend for itself” apply to free-roaming owned cats?
- No definition for “nuisance”

Current Ordinance – Orange County

- Section 4-45 (Public nuisance) subsection b3. This section refers to “interfering with the reasonable use and enjoyment by neighboring residents of their property because of its odor or excessive noise making”
- This does not address my situation where the outdoor cat is not making excessive noise and does not have an odor; however, I cannot reasonably use and enjoy my own property as a result.
- I petitioned the Animal Services Advisory Board (16 Feb 2022) to change this language. Ultimately, they felt that this would be more suited for in-town ordinance change.

Current Ordinance – Durham City/County

- Durham County Ordinance (section 4-13): *Nuisance* means any act of an animal that annoys or disturbs rights and privileges common to the public or enjoyment of private property. The commission on more than one occasion of the following acts shall be evidence of a nuisance:
 - (1) Gets into or turns over garbage containers.
 - (2) Walks on and/or sleeps on automobiles of another.
 - (3) Damages gardens, foliage or other real or personal property.
 - (4) **Continuously or frequently roams or is found on the property of another.**
 - (5) Is maintained in an unsanitary condition so as to be offensive to sight or smell.
 - (6) Is not confined to a building or secure enclosure while in estrus.
 - (7) Chases, snaps at, attacks, or otherwise molests pedestrians, bicyclists, motor vehicle passengers, farm stock, or domestic animals.
 - (8) **Urinate on private property without the permission of the owner.**
 - (9) Is diseased or dangerous to the health of the public.
 - (10) Is maintained outside less than 15 feet from a public street, road, or sidewalk and poses a threat to the general safety, health, and welfare of the general public.

My Recommendation

Add a definition to the Code of Ordinances of the Town of Chapel Hill (Section 4-1) for “nuisance” similar to the definition by Durham County.

Add language to the Code for prohibiting owned cats from free-roaming within Chapel Hill town limits.



How might this effect YOUR outdoor cat?

It's not our desire to police all owned free-roaming cats, but to have recourse for anyone affected by those cats.

Next Steps?
