

TOWN OF WEST HARTFORD

WEST HARTFORD TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING

June 23, 2026, 6:46 p.m.,

50 South Main Street

Legislative Chambers, Room 314

RE: Ordinance Concerning Dog Leashes

Reporter: Lisa L. Warner, CSR #061

1 A p p e a r a n c e s :

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3 Council Members :

4 MAYOR SHARI CANTOR

5 DEPUTY MAYOR DEBRA POLUN

6 JOHN LYONS

7 DR. GAYLE HARRIS

8 LISA LAZARUS

9 TIFFANI MCGINNIS

10 BARRY WALTERS

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12 Town Manager :

13 RICK LEDWITH

14

15 Corporation Counsel :

16 DALLAS DODGE, ESQ.

17

18 Town Clerk/Council Clerk :

19 LEON DAVIDOFF

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22 Public Speaker: Elizabeth Keifer, page 7

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1 (Commenced at 6:46 p.m.)

2 PRESIDENT CANTOR: All right. I am
3 calling the 6:45 public hearing to order. This is
4 an Ordinance Concerning Dog Leashes.

5 And we will begin with roll call,
6 Mr. Davidoff.

7 MR. DAVIDOFF: Good evening, Madam
8 Mayor.

9 Mayor Cantor.

10 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Here.

11 MR. DAVIDOFF: Councilor Harris.

12 COUNCILOR HARRIS: Here.

13 MR. DAVIDOFF: Councilor Lazarus.

14 COUNCILOR LAZARUS: Here.

15 MR. DAVIDOFF: Councilor Lyons?

16 COUNCILOR LYONS: Here.

17 MR. DAVIDOFF: Councilor McGinnis?

18 COUNCILOR MCGINNIS: Here.

19 MR. DAVIDOFF: Deputy Mayor Polun?

20 DEPUTY MAYOR POLUN: Here.

21 MR. DAVIDOFF: Councilor Walters?

22 COUNCILOR WALTERS: Here.

23 MR. DAVIDOFF: Councilor Wang is
24 absent, and Councilor Wenograd is absent. We do
25 have a quorum.

1 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Thank you very much,
2 Mr. Davidoff.

3 And we will begin with a presentation
4 by the town manager.

5 MR. LEDWITH: Thank you, Madam Mayor.
6 Good evening, everyone. For the record, Rick
7 Ledwith, town manager. And tonight we are, as you
8 know, presenting for consideration an ordinance
9 that would require dogs to be leashed while on
10 public streets, sidewalks and other town-owned
11 property except within a designated enclosed dog
12 park which we now house at 100 Mayflower.

13 West Hartford is a community that
14 values its parks, sidewalks, trails and public
15 spaces. We are also a community of pet lovers.
16 And thousands of residents responsibly walk and
17 care for their dogs every day. This proposed
18 ordinance is not intended to discourage dog
19 ownership or limit the enjoyment of public spaces;
20 rather, it is intended to promote public safety,
21 protect pets, and establish a clear and consistent
22 standard for responsible dog control throughout
23 town.

24 Currently, our town code prohibits dogs
25 from roaming free in parks and playgrounds;

1 however, that prohibition does not extend to many
2 other public areas, including sidewalks, streets,
3 and other town-owned properties. As a result, our
4 regulations are inconsistent and can create
5 confusion regarding where dogs must be under
6 leash.

7 Over the past several years, our animal
8 control officer has responded to more than 100
9 roaming dog calls. Approximately half of those
10 incidents involved dogs on public property, and 64
11 resulted in incident reports involving bites to
12 another dog or a person. While many dogs are
13 friendly and well trained, even the most obedient
14 animals can become startled, distracted or react
15 unpredictably to changing circumstances.

16 The proposed ordinance would create a
17 simple clear rule. When a dog is on public
18 property, it must be under the control of the
19 person walking the dog, using a leash or similar
20 physical restraint not exceeding 6 feet in length.
21 The ordinance also recognizes the importance of
22 providing opportunities for dogs to exercise off
23 leash by exempting our town-designated enclosed
24 dog park at 100 Mayflower.

25 The recommendation before you is based

1 on several considerations: First, it promotes
2 public safety by reducing the risk of bites,
3 attacks, and interactions that can lead to
4 injuries. Second, it protects dogs themselves
5 from hazards such as vehicle traffic and
6 unexpected encounters with people or other
7 animals. Third, it provides clear expectations
8 for residents and a straightforward enforcement
9 framework for our police department and animal
10 control staff.

11 The ordinance establishes a graduated
12 fine structure, beginning with a \$25 fine for a
13 first offense, \$50 for a second offense, and \$99
14 for the third offense and every offense
15 thereafter, while also providing an appeal process
16 consistent with other local ordinance violations.

17 At its core, this proposal is about
18 balancing the enjoyment of public spaces with the
19 responsibility we all share to ensure those spaces
20 remain safe and welcoming for everyone.

21 As you know, we've discussed this
22 ordinance twice during our Public Safety Committee
23 meetings. We had Animal Control Officer Gulino
24 join us at those meetings to share the information
25 that I share with you this evening.

1 But through you, Madam Mayor, we will
2 pause there and turn it back to the Council.
3 Thank you.

4 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Thank you very much,
5 Mr. Ledwith. Yes, we have been talking about this
6 for quite some time. And we are, yeah, so we are
7 glad that we are finally at this point.

8 We're going to go to public comment
9 first, and no one has signed up to speak.

10 Is there anyone in the audience that
11 would like to speak? Please come up, state your
12 name and address for the record. And three
13 minutes, unless you represent a group.

14 ELIZABETH KEIFER: My name is Elizabeth
15 Keifer, K-e-i-f-e-r, 1097 Farmington Avenue in
16 West Hartford.

17 The first thing I want to say is, every
18 time this issue comes up and I tell people we
19 don't have a leash law in West Hartford, they
20 argue with me and say, "Of course we must have
21 one." And then I have to say, "Well, we do in
22 parks and ballparks -- only a 6 foot leash, as he
23 said -- because I have researched it," but they
24 are very surprised.

25 And the most -- I did a tiny bit of

1 research and looked at what Glastonbury is doing
2 because I think that's a town that seems similar
3 in size and type of town that we have, and
4 Glastonbury has one that is on town property. So
5 I think it makes sense for us to move toward that.

6 And the last thing I want to say is,
7 I'm somebody who's gone through three dog bites
8 from off-the-leash dogs. The last time, I had to
9 go to court in the State of Massachusetts. I was
10 supposed to testify on behalf of the state -- I
11 had been bitten -- against this dog owner who had
12 a German Shepherd and a Weimaraner that were
13 roaming the area in Amherst.

14 And finally what happened was the State
15 of Massachusetts had a very young lawyer who
16 didn't present the appropriate paperwork to the
17 animal control officer. So, just as I was about
18 to make my starring role as a witness on the
19 stand, the bad guy's lawyer stood up and said,
20 "Your Honor, some paperwork didn't go through,"
21 bang, dismissed.

22 So, for the rest of the time, I was a
23 graduate student taking the bus, going back and
24 forth to my classes at UMass, and I had to carry a
25 tennis racket with me because I'd already been

1 bitten by these dogs, but these dogs were allowed
2 to be back on the street. So I'd get off the bus
3 at night after a grad class in the dark and have
4 to walk along with a tennis racket, hoping that I
5 didn't run into those two dogs again. And in that
6 neighborhood, one woman had a baby in a baby
7 carriage and had to lift it up in the air with the
8 baby in it because the German Shepherd of the duo
9 was going after the baby.

10 So I just think for dog attacks, dogs
11 attacking people, possible traffic issues, that
12 this would be -- this is kind of a no-brainer and
13 probably is long overdue for a town of this size
14 with this number of dogs.

15 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Thank you very much,
16 Ms. Keifer.

17 Is there anybody else in the audience
18 that would like to speak to this public hearing?

19 (No response.)

20 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Seeing none,
21 Mr. Clerk, have you received any written comments?

22 MR. DAVIDOFF: No, Madam Mayor.

23 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Okay. I'll now open
24 it up to any questions from the Council. Again,
25 we have been discussing this in committee. I

1 don't know if anybody wants to -- has any
2 questions or input.

3 Okay. Mr. Lyons.

4 COUNCILOR LYONS: Thank you, Madam
5 Mayor. Through you, I have to admit that I, too,
6 when this came up several months ago, I said, "How
7 do we not have a leash law?" So I feel you, and I
8 hear you loud and clear there.

9 And the other thing not mentioned, I
10 think my daughter has got a beautiful American
11 Bully dog, but he can be reactive to other dogs,
12 and I think the safety of other dogs is also
13 paramount, and I think this helps address that.
14 So I'll be voting in favor.

15 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Thank you very much.
16 Any other -- obviously, this will go to the
17 Council for a vote. But are there any other
18 questions for the public hearing?

19 (No response.)

20 PRESIDENT CANTOR: If not, we will
21 close the public hearing. And we actually have
22 five minutes, but one more round: Any questions?

23 (No response.)

24 PRESIDENT CANTOR: Okay. This public
25 hearing is closed, and our next public hearing

1 starts at 7.

2 (Whereupon, the public hearing
3 concluded at 6:55 p.m.)
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CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that the foregoing 11 pages are a complete and accurate computer-aided transcription of my original stenotype notes taken of the WEST HARTFORD TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING IN RE: ORDINANCE CONCERNING DOG LEASHES, which was held before THE WEST HARTFORD TOWN COUNCIL, 50 South Main Street, Legislative Chambers, Room 314, on June 23, 2026.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lisa Warner", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lisa L. Warner, CSR 061

Notary Public

My commission expires:

May 31, 2028

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