

Utahns upset over cop shooting dog make emotional appeals to Salt Lake City Council

 archive.sltrib.com/article.php

Salt Lake City • At City Council meeting, they express concerns about cop's fatal shooting of dog.



Chris Detrick | The Salt Lake Tribune A Justice for Geist rally outside of City Hall Tuesday August 12, 2014. Salt Lake City po

· August 13, 2014 9:43 am

By Christopher Smart The Salt Lake Tribune

This is an archived article that was published on sltrib.com in 2014, and information in the article may be outdated. It is provided only for personal research purposes and may not be reprinted.

Police shooting dogs is not OK – particularly when they are on their own property.

That's what about 60 people loosely organized under the banner "Justice for Geist" told the Salt Lake City Council in an emotional hearing Tuesday evening.

"I feel the police were out of control," said Susan Barretta of Salt Lake City. "There is no constraint on what they call an emergency. And when they get in over their heads, they shoot their way out."

On June 18, while conducting a search for a missing 3-year-old boy, Salt Lake City Police Officer Brett Olsen entered the fenced back yard of Sean Kendall in Sugar House and shot Geist, a 2-year-old Weimaraner.

Police officials said the 100-pound dog posed a threat to the officer. Olsen was later cleared of wrong-doing.

"This excuse that he felt threatened is not OK," Kendall said in an interview Tuesday. "Chief [Chris] Burbank not taking any action [against the officer] is public condoning of killing my dog."

Kendall turned down a \$10,000 settlement agreement with the police department.

"It would be like for \$10,000 you can break into my backyard and kill my dog," he said. "That's not right."

Many of the speakers Tuesday asked the council for a shift in policy away from lethal force. Others asked that police be held accountable for their actions.

"I want the City Council to know this is not a police-hating thing," said Murray resident Trina Melton. "We want the policy changed because we feel threatened. I'm terrified of the Salt Lake City police."

Bountiful resident Alex Gay said he was on the University of Utah police force for five years and knows officers carry non-lethal weapons, such as mace and Tasers.

"I think alternatives could have been used other than lethal force," he said. "Shooting should be the last resort."

Gay said he would like Salt Lake City police to have better training and protocols.

Travis Francis of Saratoga Springs had a similar response: "We're trying to get some policy changes," he said. "The police are getting too trigger happy. I don't want them prying into my backyard and firing their weapon."

But the City Council is reluctant to "micro-manage" the police department by setting policies that are normally left up to the police chief.

In an interview, Council Chairman Charlie Luke said the council's role is to legislate broad policies, while it's up to the administration to set day-to-day protocols. But, he added, if the police department does not have workable policies, the council could step in.

"I don't know where the police department is on its dog policy," he said. "I hope they are working on it. We'll be watching it closely."

csmart@sltrib.com

