

# So You Want To Change The World?

BY KATHY MCGUIRE



**Kathy McGuire**

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." ~ Margaret Mead*

Most of us would like to change the world – or at least our little corner of it. For me, I want to help animals that have no voice.

I became interested in township ordinances when I realized they could help further the mission of my organization, NJ Aid for Animals, Inc. (NJFAA), of preventing the exploitation and abuse of animals.

Although the word "ordinance" may sound boring, ordinances are laws that govern local municipalities. A person who violates an ordinance could face monetary fines and/or jail time. So while the word ordinance may sound boring, rest assured that if you receive a summons in the mail for violating one it will get your interest.

Most municipalities have their ordinances posted online. I encourage you to view them on your town's website, or by visiting your town's Municipal Clerk.

Take, for example, the "backyard breeder" who is selling dogs out of his home. Animal Control says that if the dogs are healthy and have food and water, there is nothing they can do. Fortunately, most municipalities have an ordinance that prohibits this type of business.

Once I confirm that someone is a "backyard breeder," usually by visiting the home under the guise of looking to purchase a dog, I head straight to the local township and file complaints. The "backyard breeder" is usually in violation of numerous ordinances such as running a business without a mercantile license; erecting signage without a permit; failure to obtain dog licenses; and violation of pet limit laws. Depending on the municipality where the "backyard breeder" is located, they may be violating additional ordinances. Confirmation of this only requires a simple trip or phone call to the local township code enforcement department.

In the case of breeding puppies, the local health department also needs to be informed. A kennel license to breed dogs must be obtained through them.

If the ordinance and local health department violations aren't enough, I also complete an IRS Form 3949-A, Information Referral for unreported income. This may not stop the individual from breeding dogs, adding to pet overpopulation, and burdening townships and shelters, but it sure slows them down.

I discovered a simple ordinance in a New Jersey municipality that helped 39 pit bulls, chained for almost 10 years on a piece of vacant property with a burned down house, get surrendered.

In 2005, NJFAA began complaining about this individual to local authorities. At the same time, NJFAA reached out to help by bringing food and watching over puppies being born in the dirt. The dogs were left alone 24/7 with the exception of once a day when the owners would come and feed them. We brought doghouses and straw as conditions were deplorable, but according to humane law enforcement they had "shelter" and were being fed once a day.

In May 2011, I couldn't sleep at night thinking of those poor dogs chained up day after day, month after month, year after year. I started poring through the ordinances and found that under 81.4 Tethering, the

dogs must be sterilized so that rogue dogs in the neighborhood could not impregnate the chained dogs. Most of the pit bulls were not sterilized.

The coup de grâce was what I found under 81.7 A. An individual may not keep an animal on VACANT property.

I immediately emailed the Mayor and advised her of the ordinances. That same week the owner was issued a summons. By mid July all the dogs were surrendered to various rescue organizations. I attended every court date of the "abuser," and listened as the judge said, "Sir, even if you erected the Taj Mahal for these dogs to live in, the property itself is still VACANT. You must surrender the dogs or remove them from the property." (For copies of emails, animal control reports, summonses issued and court records contact [info@njafa.org](mailto:info@njafa.org))

Read up on YOUR local ordinances. YOU may find a cause that could help your town. YOU can make a difference by creating an ordinance for your town! ■

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*Kathy McGuire is the founder and president of NJ Aid for Animals, Inc. (NJFAA) a 501(c)(3) no-kill animal protection charity striving to end the suffering of animals. For more information, call 856-728-0911 or visit [www.njafa.org](http://www.njafa.org). Credit to Sierra Club ([www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)) for their excellent primer on a tool kit for writing an ordinance.*