
PUBLIC SALES + RETAIL PET STORE ORDINANCE *Learn more at lawssavingpaws.org/columbia*

This ordinance improves public safety, strengthens consumer protection, supports humane animal welfare practices, and ensures animals are only sold or adopted in accountable, regulated environments.

Key Questions + Answers

1. Does this ban pet adoption?

No. The ordinance protects and allows:

- Animal shelters
- Licensed 501(c)(3) rescue organizations
- Authorized adoption events
- Pet store rescue partnerships

It targets unregulated sales, not legitimate adoptions.

2. Can people still rehome pets privately?

Yes. Private transfers are allowed when conducted at:

- Private residences
- Veterinary offices
- Law enforcement safe exchange locations

The ordinance restricts animal sales and transfers in public outdoor spaces and inside retail pet stores.

3: What happens if someone has an accidental litter?

Accidental litters can still be responsibly rehomed through private residences and other placement channels outlined in the ordinance draft. The goal is to ensure animals are placed safely and thoughtfully, not to remove options for care.

This approach also emphasizes prevention. Pet owners are encouraged to:

- Take steps to avoid accidental litters
- Use low-cost spay/neuter services offered through the local shelter

Community education groups like LSP also help by promoting responsible pet ownership and preventative care.

4. How will responsible breeders find homes for their animals?

Truly responsible breeders already use established, transparent methods to place animals in suitable homes, including:

- The American Kennel Club marketplace and breeder referral systems (when applicable), which connect breeders with screened, interested buyers
- Placement directly from their homes, allowing for careful screening and matching of adopters
- Trusted networks such as word-of-mouth referrals, repeat buyers, breed clubs, and recommendations from veterinarians or other breeders

These existing channels are already effective for ethical breeders and help ensure placements remain intentional, responsible, and focused on animal welfare.

5. Why regulate public spaces like parking lots and flea markets?

These locations lack oversight and are commonly associated with:

- Fraud and misrepresentation
- Difficulty enforcing accountability
- Public safety risks, including unsafe transactions and lack of traceability
- Public health concerns, such as the spread of disease without veterinary oversight
- Increased costs to taxpayers through shelter intake and enforcement
- Poor animal welfare conditions

The ordinance ensures animals are not sold or given away in unsafe or transient environments.

6. Why include pet stores?

While the City of Columbia does not currently have a retail pet store selling animals, communities with growing populations are often targeted by these businesses. Without proactive regulation, this can lead to an influx of commercially bred animals entering the area, placing additional strain on local shelters, resources, and animal welfare systems.

The ordinance eliminates retail sales of dogs, cats, and rabbits while still allowing:

- Pet supplies and services
- Shelter and rescue adoption events

This maintains business viability while removing commercial animal sales linked to large-scale breeding concerns.

7. Why not just issue trespassing citations?

While trespassing laws can sometimes apply, they're not a reliable solution. They create a reactive "wild goose chase," as sellers can easily move from one location to another. Enforcement also depends on verifying permission, often requiring contact with property owners who may be out of state and difficult to reach.

Most importantly, trespassing laws regulate property access—not the sale or transfer of animals or the related public safety, consumer protection, and animal welfare concerns. A clear ordinance provides a consistent, enforceable standard so the City can address the issue directly, and helps build momentum for broader, statewide protections.

8. Will this hurt local businesses?

No. Pet stores and related businesses may continue operating normally. The ordinance only removes retail animal sales, not retail operations.

9. Why include rabbits?

Rabbits are frequently sold in the same unregulated environments as dogs and cats. Including them prevents loopholes and ensures consistent animal welfare protections.

10. Is this government overreach?

No. The ordinance is narrowly focused on:

- Public safety risks
- Consumer fraud prevention
- Regulated commercial activity involving live animals, which differs from other types of commerce due to its documented impacts on public health, public safety, and increased strain on local shelters and community resources
- Animal welfare concerns

It doesn't regulate private ownership or responsible breeding.

11. How is the ordinance enforced?

Enforcement is handled by:

- Animal control officers
- Code enforcement
- Law enforcement

Violations are civil offenses and may include fines, impoundment, and recovery of care costs.

12. What problem is this solving?

This ordinance addresses:

- Unregulated roadside animal sales
- Parking lot and flea market transactions
- Fraudulent or misleading animal sales
- Overburdened shelters
- Lack of accountability in animal distribution

13. Won't people continue to sell animals elsewhere, like from their homes or online?

They may, but this ordinance is not intended to eliminate all animal sales. It targets the highest-risk, least accountable channels—such as roadside, parking lot, and flea market transactions—where oversight is lowest and problems are most common.

By removing these environments, the ordinance improves accountability, reduces harm, and makes enforcement more feasible, as irresponsible or high-volume breeders are less likely to operate in private, traceable settings.

Overall Goal

This ordinance promotes a safer and more responsible system for animal transactions by:

- Improving public safety
- Strengthening consumer protection
- Reducing strain on shelters and local resources
- Encouraging responsible and transparent economic activity
- Supporting humane animal welfare practices

It ensures that animal sales occur in structured, accountable environments that benefit both the community and the animals involved.