

## Growing Number of Pit Bulls Being Bred for Combat, Council Panel Told

By a NEWSsource staff writer

An alarming number of pit bulls are being bred for combat, speakers warned a City Council panel last Monday.

Phyllis Daugherty, a self-described "animal welfare activist," said owning pit bulls exclusively for fighting has become so common that the dogs can be seen "chained under crack houses."

"It's not going to stop on its own," Daugherty said.

Police officers told members of the council's Public Safety Committee that

their department has handled four cases of dog fighting since 1995, leading to eight arrests. But officers said the problem is greater than indicated by those numbers.

LAPD Capt. Harlan Ward said his department will handle the growing problem with three steps: city-wide training of patrol officers to respond appropriately to pit bull fighting calls, expanded training of vice officers, and a stronger relationship with the animal regulation department.

Part of the problem is that not enough residents know that pit bull fighting is a serious crime, Ward said. Dog

fighting is a felony in California and can result in 16 months to four years in prison.

The committee approved the LAPD plan and a similar plan of the city's Department of Animal Regulation.

Animal Regulation needs additional staffing to handle dog fighting and other animal problems, officials said.

Department General Manager Gary Olsen said understaffing is so bad that staff does not respond to 40 percent of calls to the department.

In their proposed 1997-98 budget, Animal Regulation Department officials

requested \$802,000 for 20 additional staff and a public awareness campaign.

The department wants to create a humane investigation unit to investigate animal cruelty cases, such as dog fighting, and a special enforcement unit to sweep city areas for loose dogs.

Councilwoman Laura Chick, who chairs the committee, said she wanted to pass on those requests to the full council as soon as possible.

But Councilman Nate Holden requested time to look into the city's handling of the dog fighting and allegations that the department's understaffing has led to mistreatment of animals.