



## OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

### PRESS RELEASE

#### **CITY URGES PUBLIC TO BE AWARE OF SICK WILDLIFE**

ATHENS, TENNESSEE – March 19, 2019 – On Sunday, March 17, 2019, the Athens Police Department was dispatched to the area of Dossett Street in reference to a racoon that the caller believed to be rabid. The caller advised that the racoon was walking around in circles.

When officers arrived in the area, they were contacted by multiple people who reported that there was a racoon in the area acting strangely.

When officers found the racoon near the road on Dossett Street, they observed it foaming out of its mouth and running around in circles. The racoon also displayed aggressive behavior, such as snarling and baring its teeth. While the officers were there, the racoon appeared to have several seizures, falling over and convulsing.

Officers contacted Athens Animal Control and the Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency (TWRA) in an attempt to find someone to trap the animal and transport it out of the area. However, neither agency was able to respond and provide additional options for dealing with the animal.

The symptoms displayed by the animal were consistent with either distemper or rabies. Such conditions are contagious and can present a danger to domestic pets and people that might come into contact with the animal. As a safety precaution and in order to end the animal's suffering, the officer put down the animal.

The presence of wildlife with these conditions is most likely during warmer parts of the year. As we approach the spring and summer seasons, the City encourages citizens to be especially wary and report any such instances of animals behaving strangely.

City Manager C. Seth Sumner said "We live in a beautiful city that is blessed with natural resources. Part of living in close proximity to nature means that we have to be especially aware of issues such as rabies or distemper in wildlife such as foxes, coyotes, and raccoons. Dealing with the occasional infected animal is an unfortunate but necessary part of living so close to nature. I was disappointed to learn that the body of this racoon was left on the side of the road for several hours after the incident was over. This was due to

miscommunications between employees from different city departments. The Police Chief and Public Works Director are reviewing the City's practices to address this. We apologize to any families that live in the area and want them to know we're taken steps to ensure this doesn't happen again."

The City of Athens is a full-service municipality nestled in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains and has garnered a reputation as the "Friendly City."

For more information, please contact the Office of the City Manager at 423-744-2702.

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