

Animal Care Advisory Committee Meeting

Board Minutes

Friday, August 2, 2019

Broward County Animal Care and Adoption

Multi-Purpose Room

2400 SW 42nd Street

Fort Lauderdale, FL. 33312

Part 1 - Call to Order and Roll Call

The Meeting was called to order at 11:22 am.

Present: Dr. David Eich, Chair Grace Johns, Sue Martino, Danny Finkelstein, and Joanne Oyen (There was a quorum.)

Absent: Debra Parsons-Drake and Sherry Cohen

Broward County Animal Care and Adoption Division (County): Alessandra Medri, Assistant Director; Bettina Kuske, Committee Coordinator; Maite Azcoitia, Broward County Attorney; Wade Sparkman, Animal Care Business Manager; and Carrie Gibson, Shelter Program Project Coordinator for RTF/Community Cats

Part 2 - Selection of Meeting Secretary

Joanne Oyen volunteered to prepare the minutes of today's meeting.

Part 3 - Public Input

Sloan Cowart expressed concern over the lack of respect for volunteers, including bullying and firings by Shelter Management, as volunteers are passionate and are free labor. She said that "Respect is a two-way street" but not what she has personally experienced as a volunteer. She also expressed concern over the shelter's overcapacity. She said that "Every Shelter Pet Matters and Every Volunteer Matters" and stressed that many of the Shelter's animals have made it out alive because of dedicated volunteers who are a "lifeline of free help".

Lead Volunteer Rhonda Laffey countered Sloan Cowart's comments and said that there has been bullying in social media which bashes the Shelter. She said that most volunteers want positive things to be said about the shelter. She said volunteers must be positive and sign agreements that they will follow shelter rules. Rhonda stated that the Shelter has approximately 300 volunteers.

Rita Green said that she attempted to volunteer but was rejected. She offered to bring more rescue groups to the Shelter but was ignored. She brought up the 5 to 6 good volunteers being fired over the past couple of months while others have been refused "hire". She said that the volunteers who were fired were very good with handling pit bulls. Rita said that "no one is realizing what is going on and is connecting the dots". She expressed concerned about many problems at the Shelter not being identified and addressed.

Danny Finkelstein told the Public Input speakers that he hears their concerns and would like to discuss them during the meeting. Chair Johns said that these issues can be discussed further under Non-Agenda items.

County Attorney Maite Azcoita said that the Advisory Committee Meeting is not the venue for volunteers to complain and that they must go through the proper Shelter channels. Volunteers who were present said that they have tried this and have either been ignored or been met with passive aggressive responses from Shelter Management. Maite said that the Committee's mission is goal setting and that volunteers should express their concerns to Shelter Management and the County Commissioners.

Volunteer Kristin Wambold said that she has reached out to Shelter Management about her concerns but received a "very passive-aggressive" response from Director Lauralei Combs with CCs to all the County Commissioners. Other Shelter volunteers present at the Meeting said they have expressed their concerns to Shelter Management and have also been ignored. Chair Johns stated that an item can be added to the agenda of the next meeting that addresses policies regarding shelter volunteers.

Karen Sands agreed with Sloan Cowart's comments. Karen stated that there are not enough beds for the dogs when funds are available to buy more beds. She is requesting more Kuranda beds, especially for the senior dogs. She questioned why Kuranda beds are given to the younger dogs when they should be prioritized to senior dogs until more are ordered. She also said that proper kennel disinfecting practices are not being followed and that the dogs do not have a dry place to rest. She said that employees who are disinfecting the kennels should put the Kuranda bed up against the wall to allow it to stay dry, instead of getting soaked by the houses, and then put the bed back down once the kennel is dry. Karen stated her dismay that the play groups for dogs have been stopped, that dogs are not getting walked, and are becoming crazy in their kennels. She mentioned that there is not enough trust in the Shelter's Rescue Coordinator and, that in the case of one dog, a Shelter employee reached out directly to a rescue group to find a home for the dog, instead of going to the Shelter's own Rescue Coordinator because of lack of confidence in that Rescue Coordinator.

As a number of people voiced their concerns about treatment of volunteers at the Shelter and we needed to move on to other scheduled topics on the Agenda, Chair Grace Johns said that we would have further discussion about this in the Non-Agenda section of the Meeting.

Part 4 – Introduction of New Committee Members

Chair Johns did advise all that there is a new Committee Member who has an excused absence for this Meeting and will be present at the next Advisory Committee Meeting.

Part 5- Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Minutes from the June 14th Advisory Committee Meeting were read. Danny Finkelstein asked that a letter that he wrote and read at the last Meeting be added to the June 14th Minutes. Chair Grace Johns asked him to forward that letter to Bettina Kuske so that the June 14th Minutes can be amended with the addition of the letter. A Motion was made by Joanne Oyen to approve the June 14th Minutes with Danny Finkelstein seconding them.

Part 6 – Staff Update on Kitten Programs

Shelter Program Project Coordinator for RTF/Community Cats Carrie Gibson advised that there are currently 511 kittens and cats in foster homes. She was asked how many are at the Shelter but said she did not have the actual number. Assistant Shelter Director Alessandra Medri said she would email these stats to us. Carrie Gibson stated that it would be very helpful if we could get Broward's veterinarians involved without too much burden. Chair Grace Johns commented that a partnership with the Broward Veterinarians Association is needed and that regular presentations and constant education about the

Shelter's Cat Programs would be helpful. Dr. David Eich said that some of the veterinarians are not aware of the real need and should be educated throughout the year. He said it would be good if each veterinarian's office could take one litter of kittens a year which would help the welfare of the kittens and alleviate the overcrowding at the Shelter. He offered to speak with the President of the Broward Veterinarians Association about implementing the aforementioned suggestions.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION ITEMS

Part 7 – Status of the Two Letters Submitted to Broward County Animal Care and Adoption On Behalf of the Committee

Chair Johns brought up the two letters that she originally drafted and which were sent to all Advisory Committee Members. The Advisory Committee Members confirmed that they had received these. She asked for updates as to whether these letters had been submitted to the Broward County Board of Commissioners and what their status is. The first letter, dated June 20th, was regarding the transfer of \$150,000 ASAP from the General Trust Fund Reserve Account into the Animal Care Sterilization Trust Fund for Spay and Neuter Programs which has been closed due to no funding. Dr. David Eich questioned whether funds from the General Trust Fund can be used for Sterilization as Chapter 4 does not expressly state that those General Trust Funds can be used for this purpose. Chair Johns said that only the Commissioners could approve the transfer of \$150K into the Sterilization Trust Fund.

The second letter sent by Chair Johns is regarding funding for the Sterilization and Adoption Programs by reallocating the rabies license tag revenues from the Broward County General Fund to the Animal Care Sterilization and Adoption Trust Funds. She is concerned that both Funds are very underfunded as rabies tag fees have not increased and feels that the Commissioners should consider this. Chair Johns requested that revenues from the first 100,000 rabies licenses sold not be restricted and instead be allocated 50/50 to the Sterilization and Adoption Trust Funds. Discussion ensued regarding rabies license sales revenue to these two funds. For the first 100,000 rabies licenses sold, \$3 from each license sold goes to the Sterilization Trust Fund and \$1 per rabies license sold goes to the Adoption Trust Fund. The balance of revenue goes to the County's general fund. Chair Johns suggested in her letter that all of the rabies license tag revenues be sent to the two funds with a 50/50 split. The committee was told that the Shelter has budgeted for 131,000 rabies tags to be sold in 2019 compared to 123,000 in 2018 and 129,000 in 2017 which confirms Chair Johns' comment that rabies tag sales have not increased and why it is important to more adequately fund the Animal Care Sterilization and Adoption Trust Funds.

Chair Johns asked if the two letters had been submitted to the Commissioners. Assistant Director Alessandra Medri advised that the first letter was sent along with a letter from Animal Care Director Lauralei Combs to the Commissioners and that there was some "back and forth for a few weeks" and that the County Administrator was involved. She stated that the decision was made to instead use the money to fund a Low Cost Spay and Neuter Wellness Clinic and a spay/neuter van. She also stated that the Commissioners received but decided not to take action on the second letter.

Chair Grace Johns expressed her concern that a lot of valuable time had been lost to fund Spay and Neuter Programs between funding running out, the Commissioners being on recess, and then having to wait until the next Commission Meeting on August 20th. She underscored the fact that there was no funding for August and September and the very likely possibility of no funding until the new 2020 Budget Year starting October 1st.

PART 8 – Proposed Amendments to Chapter 4 – Dogs and Cats, Sec. 4-30 – Animal Care General Trust Fund

There was much discussion among committee members regarding potential changes to Chapter 4 – Dogs and Cats. Chair Johns stated that she asked County Attorney Maite Azcoita to propose changes to this chapter that would be beneficial to County residents and to promote the County’s No Kill efforts. Ms. Azcoita said that the draft proposed changes are just the first edit and the amended Chapter is far from final.

County Attorney Azcoita stated that there are four trust funds – Victim, Adoption, Sterilization, and General. She proposed maintaining the General Trust Fund for reimbursements. There was much discussion as to the maximum caps that can be allocated for medical reimbursements and whether fostered pet owners should be reimbursed the same amounts as owners who have adopted their pets. Chair Johns feels it is important that reimbursements to Fosters and Adopters be equal. She said that caps would remove the Committee’s option to increase reimbursements further. A Motion was made by Sue Martino to cap at \$2,000 medical reimbursements for the General Trust Fund to Fosters and Adopters, including for animals that have not been adopted from the Shelter. Joanne Oyen seconded this Motion. Three Committee members were in favor of this Motion and two were opposed.

County Attorney Azcoita proposed that applicants seeking reimbursement for veterinary expenses sign an application that states they do not have the ability to pay the veterinary expenses being sought for reimbursement. She said that the Advisory Committee can define the criteria that applicants should provide as proof of their inability to afford the expenses.

“Aggressive Dog” – County Attorney Maite Azcoita said that there is a need to close the loophole on the current “Free Bite” that is allowed the first time that a dog bites another dog. She said that a proposed change to Chapter 4 is if a dog severely injures another dog, it could be deemed “aggressive”. Attorney Azcoita said that Owners and Keepers are required to report dog bites but that the County does not currently say that it is a violation not to do so. She said this needs to be “cleaned up”.

There was a discussion of bite fees and a proposal was made for a \$300 reduction for owners whose dogs bite from the current \$500 fine if they pay the victim dog’s vet bills. There is presently \$20,000 in the Bite Fund which has gone unused for years. Discussion ensued as to moving those funds over to the Sterilization Trust Fund as Chair Johns feels that a lot of sterilizations could be done with these funds. She proposed that \$15,000 be moved to the Sterilization Trust Fund and leaving \$5,000 in the Bite Fund.

Breeder Permits and Requirements - County Attorney Maite Azcoita mentioned that it is a violation to breed more than once a year. Chair Grace Johns asked how rescue organizations are protected as breeders. County Attorney Maite Azcoita referred all to Chapter 4, Section 6.5, Breeder Permits and Requirements. The decision was made to exclude rescue groups as breeders. Much discussion ensued as to the definition of a “breeder”. Assistant Director Medri advised that a breeder is one who advertises and sells a dog for profit: i.e. where money changes hands. She stated that the County does investigate breeders who breed repetitively. She said that a County Breeder Permit is \$100 per year and these permits are kept on file at the Shelter.

Chair Johns proposed edits to Chapter 4 such that all revenue from all rabies licenses sales be placed 50/50 into the Sterilization and Adoption Trust Funds. Much discussion ensued among committee members. Chair Johns stated that only a small portion of the cat and dog-owning population in Broward County is paying the rabies license fee and a future committee agenda item should be to address policies that would increase rabies license fee sales.

PART 9 – NON-AGENDA ITEMS

Chair Grace Johns proposed that some funds be allocated from the Adoption Trust Fund for animal behaviorists for hard to adopt dogs so that they do not get euthanized. An amount was not specified. Sue Martino made a Motion on this recommendation and Joanne Oyen seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.

Danny Finkelstein expressed his observation that he does not see any Shelter adoption events mentioned in either the Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel or the Miami Herald and recommended that this be done. He said that he does see the Miami-Dade Shelter events listed in the Miami Herald.

The discussion returned to volunteer concerns with Sue Martino proposing that both sides come to the table. A recommendation was made that the staff form a round table with volunteers and other interested people to discuss the future of volunteers at the Shelter. Danny Finkelstein made a Motion on this recommendation and the vote passed unanimously.

Joanne Oyen expressed concerns over volunteer concerns not being heard, that some very good volunteers have been fired which is causing low morale and bad publicity for the Shelter, plus that the animals are being affected. She asked if a grievance process had been followed before volunteers received letters stating they had been fired. Some volunteers who were present at the meeting said there had been no such process. Dr. David Eich recommended that a review process be followed before volunteers are fired. Joanne Oyen asked for a temporary suspension on firing volunteers until the roundtable meeting between Shelter management and volunteers takes place and made a Motion on this recommendation. Chair Grace Johns seconded it and the vote passed 3 yeas and 2 nays.

Discussion ensued regarding whether there should be an additional committee meeting to discuss volunteer issues. Bettina Kuske stated that she will send out an email poll to see what date would be good for the Advisory Committee Members to have an additional meeting between today and November 8.

ADJOURNMENT

A reminder was made that the next Animal Care Advisory Committee Meeting will be on Friday, November 8, 2019 at 11:15 am. Sue Martino made a motion to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Chair Johns. The motion passed unanimously. The Meeting adjourned at 1:14 pm.