

Task Force on the Humane Treatment of Animals in Regional and Municipal Shelters
Meeting Minutes
April 1, 2015

Members Present:

Michael Freda
Mark Bailey
Paula Poplawski
Raymond Connors
Dr. Kimberly MacDonald
Sgt. Paula Keller
Dianne Collette

Members Absent:

Cynthia Theran

Others in Attendance:

Joseph Pisano
Laura Burban
Elizabeth Abbe
Chris Lamb
Roz Nenner

Meeting Facilitator: Michael Freda

The regular meetings of the Task Force on the Humane Treatment of Animals in Regional and Municipal shelters was called to order at 2:16 PM, in the State of Connecticut Legislative Office Building (LOB), 300 Capitol Avenue, Room 1B, Hartford, CT by Michael Freda.

Public Comment:

Mr. Freda asked the task force members to introduce themselves. Mr. Freda moved to item two of the agenda, Public Comment relative to the Agenda. Seeing none, Mr. Freda moved on to item three of the agenda, Review and Discussion of minutes of March 4, 2015 meeting. Mr. Freda asked if there were any comments on the minutes and seeing none entertained a motion to accept the minutes. A motion was made by Dr. MacDonald and seconded by Sgt. Keller. Mr. Freda called a voice vote and the motion passed.

Old Business:

Mr. Freda stated that in the packet provided by the Planning and Development Committee, there was a follow-up testimony from Annie Hornish.

Mr. Freda moved to item five of the agenda, Old Business.

Mr. Freda stated there are three things that he wishes to accomplish today and have discussions on:

1. The ACO survey
2. The updated licensing pamphlet
3. Draft of the state licensing program

Mr. Freda moved on to item one of the seven point action plan and discussed a universal system for stray animals to be put into homes if they are not micro chipped.

Sgt. Keller stated that she missed the last meeting, and wanted a summary of what the discussion from last meeting.

Dr. MacDonald stated that she did not understand Mr. Freda's statement, and asked if the animal is allowed to go back with their owners if found and not micro chipped? She stated that the owner should be allowed to get their animal back even if they are not micro chipped.

Sgt. Keller stated if the pet owners have a license, then there is nothing they can do.

Mr. Freda stated that last meeting there was a discussion on micro chipping and what it would take to put those animals back into their home and asked how the task force should approach this.

Dr. MacDonald recommends that if a dog is not licensed and the owner comes to get the dog that it be required to microchip and license the dog before given back.

Mr. Connors stated that dogs are personal property, and they can't hold personal property. The law currently states they have to pay a redemption fee and have to get a license. There are centers that have micro chipping but it is done by a veterinarian.

Dr. MacDonald agrees with Mr. Connors and changed her recommendation to advise that the dog be micro chipped and give them references.

Mr. Connors stated that the town of Monroe offers that and when any dog is adopted the microchip is included in the fee.

Mr. Freda asked if everyone was in agreement that ACOs should not be a part of micro chipping and asked Dr. MacDonald re-state her recommendation.

Dr. MacDonald stated that the owner who is redeeming their dog, who they have not found a microchip in, be advised and given information about why and where to get a microchip.

Sgt. Keller agreed and stated that they can try and get municipalities to get micro chipping pamphlets.

Mr. Freda asked if the task force would like to make a list of recommendations for a pamphlet.

Sgt. Keller and Dr. MacDonald both agreed with Mr. Freda

Mr. Freda asked the task force members to email him recommendations for a pamphlet and he will put the pamphlet together and present it next meeting or the June meeting.

Mr. Freda moved to item two of the seven point action plan, ACO survey to be sent out, and passed out the draft of the cover letter and explained what is on the survey.

Ms. Collette asked if the cover letter would be attached to the survey.

Mr. Freda stated it would and asked if the survey should be sent out under the Department of Agriculture.

Mr. Connors stated that it should not and should be sent out through the Connecticut Municipal Animal Control Officers Association.

Mr. Connors suggested that the survey be put into a PDF document and sent to the President of the CT Municipal Animal Control Officers Association to be emailed out. If the form was fillable that would be better also. Mr. Connors stated he doesn't think they will get many surveys back and only believes they will get 20% feedback.

Mr. Freda asked the task force if they should even send the survey out if they are only going to get 20% feedback.

Dr. MacDonald stated that some of the places that need the support don't have email so they would be excluding the shelters that need the most need.

Mr. Freda asked do they send the survey if Mr. Connors is correct and would it be valuable information for the task force.

Ms. Collette asked what the goal of the survey was to begin with.

Mr. Freda stated it was to gain a repository of information for future recommendations to the state.

Dr. MacDonald stated that any information is valuable, but if they only get answers back from the top shelters in the state then the data will be skewed.

Sgt. Keller stated that if she wasn't on the task force she would want the survey to be sent to her first then she would go over the survey with her animal control officer.

She stated some of the bigger municipalities have supervisors on the police department and it would be better to email the sergeants, captains, and lieutenants who are in charge of the animal control facility to go over with their animal control officers.

Mr. Connors asked what if they just sent the survey to the large municipalities, they would get a good view because there are more impoundments there.

Mr. Bailey stated that the survey was written with the bigger municipalities in mind.

Sgt. Keller stated to send it to everyone so they all have a chance to answer questions and when going through the bigger municipalities to go through the police departments.

Dr. MacDonald agreed with Sgt. Keller and that the smaller shelters are still important.

Mr. Freda asked Mr. Connors if he should send him the survey first and asked him what he will do before it gets sent out.

Mr. Connors stated that he will make sure it gets to the right person so it gets emailed out to the animal control officers.

Mr. Freda asked if he should sent it in an excel sheet or a fillable pdf.

Mr. Connors stated either way is fine

Ms. Poplawski stated that the way you fill them out is totally different and that you can turn an excel sheet to a pdf but doesn't know if you can make a pdf into an excel sheet.

Mr. Freda stated he will work on it and send it to Mr. Connors and that it would be June before they have something conclusive to report. Mr. Freda stated he would like to memorialize the discussion in the form of a motion. The motion is to take the cover letter and survey and put it into a fillable pdf or excel and he will insert his email address on it to send it to Mr. Connors who will then send it out.

Mr. Bailey seconded the motion, and called a voice vote. The motion passed.

Mr. Freda moved on to item three of the action plan, "update licensing pamphlet." Mr. Freda stated it was the same pamphlet, but with a pitbull added from Ms. Poplawski's recommendation.

Mr. Freda reviewed what was in the pamphlet and asked what contact information should be included.

Mr. Connors stated that on page 2 where it says, "Laws governing pet licensing varies between cities, counties and states," the whole paragraph is going to have to be removed if the pamphlet is going to be specifically for Connecticut.

Mr. Connors also stated counties needed to be taken out and also where it says licensing fee, under licensing is a lost dog's ticket home, should be fees.

Mr. Freda reviewed what Mr. Connors had suggested.

Mr. Connors stated that under the FAQ section it should say annually in the month of June and to remove everything under cat licensing.

Sgt. Keller stated that under where it says "why should I get my dog licensed" it should say because it is state law.

Mr. Connors stated that the town clerks have a conference and they would be happy to take the pamphlets and distribute it at the conference and in their offices.

Mr. Freda stated he would send Mr. Connors any changes and suggestions.

Mr. Connors suggested under contact information to put contact your local animal control officer.

Ms. Collette suggested adding and/or town clerk to the contact information.

Mr. Freda stated that he could give the actual pamphlets to his town clerk and they will bring it to the conference.

Mr. Connors stated they also have a fall conference also.

Mr. Freda moved on to item 4 of the action plan, which continued the discussion of a state wide campaign to license dogs. He asked if the task force wanted to move forward with a recommendation to the state to create a statewide dog licensing program.

Mr. Connors stated that it comes up every year and the bill always dies, if it becomes statewide then it takes money from the municipality. He also stated that if the Department of Agriculture took on licensing, it would be a huge fiscal note.

Ms. Poplawski stated that there are a very small percentage of people that license their dogs and she would like to see it raised. She stated the current system is not working.

Sgt. Keller stated that the reason why the system isn't working is because there is not enough enforcement and information.

Mr. Connors stated there was a program with municipalities with dog license surveys where the municipalities got 10% more of the licensing money.

Mr. Freda stated he would work on the pamphlet and get it to Mr. Connors and his town clerk.

Dr. MacDonald stated that there should be a spot in the pamphlet that says a new license is due in the month of June and that it is important to update information then.

Mr. Freda asked for the recommendation to be emailed to him and moved onto item five of the action plan, discussion regarding existing MACO stats to put them into a better format.

Mr. Connors stated that the purpose of the MACO reports are required by law and the information in the forms is what is required for the ACO to do by law so the Department of Agriculture can police what is going on in municipalities. He also explained how shelters number the animals they intake.

Ms. Collette suggested that on top where they write stats it could be delineated there.

Mr. Connors stated that anything as simple as this will add a fiscal note because the forms need to be changed. Mr. Connors also wanted to clarify a mistaken with the city of West Hartford impoundment numbers, and they are corrected now and if someone wanted the corrected numbers to email him.

Mr. Freda asked Mr. Connors what he would like to do for the future since he is on the sub-committee.

Mr. Connors asked the task force as a whole to email him ideas that are within the statutes.

Ms. Poplawski asked for a copy of the statute.

Mr. Bailey stated that New Haven, along with the MACO reports, does fill the asilomar form also.

Mr. Connors stated that he would like to see the asilomar report.

Mr. Freda explained the MACO report for the audience.

Sgt. Keller stated that she can see where it will be difficult to change the MACO report because of the statute wording.

Mr. Bailey stated that the ACO in New Haven had no problems filling out both forms.

Mr. Freda stated maybe filling out both forms could be the solution.

Dr. MacDonald suggested making the asilomar reports voluntary to get a better result before changing the statute wording.

Ms. Collette agreed.

Mr. Freda moved to item six of the action plan: a review of developing best in class volunteer programs for animal shelters and discussion of establishing sub-committees to work up the volunteer program.

He then recapped what the task force has discussed about the volunteer program.

Mr. Freda stated that a reduction of kennel stress through a good volunteer program cannot be a bad thing, for any of those who are opposed to a volunteer program.

Mr. Connors explained volunteer programs in different municipalities.

Mr. Freda stated that in previous meeting they discussed the possibility of retired senior citizens walking dogs and the reverse therapy could help the senior citizen. There was also the possibility of the increase of dogs finding their forever homes where volunteers could become attached to an animal and adopt it.

Mr. Connors stated it is better for the dog's health rather than being in a cage most of the day.

Dr. MacDonald stated a volunteer program is beneficial if it is done properly.

Mr. Freda explained that they have a sub-committee for creating a volunteer program to bring to the task force.

Sgt. Keller stated that many big towns don't have enough money for staffing and explained the situation at her shelter.

Mr. Bailey stated that many volunteer groups take on fundraising and that the volunteer groups could raise funds.

Mr. Freda suggested that the sub-committee come back with a recommendation for the task force and that nothing will be mandated. He also stated that if one municipality adopted the recommended volunteer plan, then it would be worth it.

Dr. MacDonald agreed and suggested some smaller shelters develop a relationship with other rescue groups who can get them to a place where they aren't sitting in the kennel, such as a foster home. Sgt. Keller stated that her shelter does have people that foster dogs and also have people come in and take the dogs out. She stated she would love to have a structured volunteer program but the problem is staffing.

Mr. Connors stated that municipalities are liable for fostered dogs.

Mr. Freda stated he would like to move forward and make the sub-committee for the volunteer program and Ms. Poplawski volunteered head the sub-committee with Laura Burban.

Mr. Freda moved on to item six of the action plan, a review of the proposed volunteer application form. He then explained the form.

Mr. Freda moved to item 5b on the agenda, Review of New Britain Rescue Group Road Show

Ms. Poplawski gave an update on the road show. She stated there were 9 people in attendance from the Task Force, New Britain Animal Welfare Commission, Bikers Against Animal Cruelty, Brass City Rescue Alliance, Protectors of Animals, and Thank Dog Rescue. The recommendations were:

- Mandatory spay and neuter for shelters
- Volunteer programs
- Stronger laws for animal cruelty
- Reviewing rescue groups
- Business plan
- Bylaws of the organization
- Review of adoption contract
- Return policy, if any
- Educational handout

Mr. Freda stated that the task force spoke of having this concept in other municipalities and should they try and do another one.

Ms. Poplawski stated she would like to see another before a decision to not do another.

Sgt. Keller asked what they hoped to get out of these meetings

Ms. Poplawski stated she would like to get what makes a rescue more successful than others and if they need to regulate rescues.

Sgt. Keller suggested that the animal control officers can create an online data base of rescues that they use and trust

Mr. Connors stated the registering of private animal shelters in the state of Connecticut is not too farfetched of an idea.

Ms. Poplawski asked if they are going to have another road show or regroup.

Mr. Freda stated they should regroup and see if the public comment has any recommendations and moved to item six on the agenda, New Business.

New Business:

Mr. Freda stated that there is SB 352 to extend the task force did not happen and ended up being written into another bill. Mr. Freda stated the task force is still commissioned. He stated SB 352 is now written as SB 351 and over the course of the next few months will try and gather support to keep the task force extended to February 2016.

Mr. Connors asked what committee the bill will be introduced.

Mr. Freda stated the environment committee.

Mr. Freda asked if there were any informational updates and seeing none moved to item 6c, follow up plan, and stated they discussed followed up plans and moved to item 7 of the agenda, Open Forum. Seeing none Mr. Freda moved to item 8 of the agenda, Public Comment.

Joseph Pisano, from New Haven, stated that currently the law to breed is that you can breed two litters and year and don't have to register them. If you breed ten or less dogs a year it's a \$50 fee and more than ten it's a \$100 fee.

He stated that there are people out there who have no business breeding and dump the mother onto the street.

Mr. Pisano suggested passing a law and charging a registration fee for the litter.

Sgt. Keller agreed with Mr. Pisano and stated that her opinion is that people who truly breed dogs will do it for the love of the breed and will pay the registration fee. She also agreed that backyard breeders are a huge problem and that New Britain has passed an ordinance on breeding.

Mr. Bailey thanked Mr. Pisano for coming and that the New Haven Humane Commission has passed a breeding ordinance similar to New Britain.

Mr. Connors stated that it would be better to address the issue at the local level rather than the state level because there will be huge groups lobbying against it and also that violation fees would go to the municipality rather than the general fund.

Mr. Pisano stated that if a law was passed in New Haven than the breeder could go to North Haven to breed and then sell the puppies in New Haven and not have any fine to pay which is why he would like to see a law passed at the state level and to give the power back to the towns.

Sgt. Keller stated that the language in the New Britain ordinance addresses this issue.

Mr. Freda asked Mr. Connors what the downside is of recommending this to the state and Mr. Connors stated there was none.

Mr. Freda asked Joe to look at the New Britain and New Haven ordinances and draft what he would like to have and send it to Mr. Freda.

Laura Burban stated that she agrees with Mr. Pisano and about spaying and neutering. She explained the rescue group program and that looked at what one out of state shelter does.

She stated that anyone who wants to adopt a shelter animal goes through a rescue group is who an affiliate of the animal shelter.

Ms. Burban then stated that she was happy to do anything anyone suggests about the volunteer program. She agreed with Sgt. Keller about how staffing is difficult, and that she convinced the town to hire a kennel cleaner which gave her time to start building her volunteer program.

Elizabeth Abbe stated that she was a participant in the road show and that she thought It was extremely constructive. She stated that she thought the individual with the challenge of becoming a 501C3 was interesting.

Ms. Abbe also agrees with the mandatory spay and neutering.

Ms. Abbe also stated that the road show was great because she was able to network like she hadn't before and is now in contact with three other groups and told Ms. Poplawski she did a great job and endorses doing another.

Mr. Connors stated that the New England Federation of Human Societies is having a conference next week, and that is a great place to network with shelters all over New England and different part of the country.

Mr. Connors also stated that the mandatory spay and neutering some towns allows the ACO to take the dog to a veterinarian and the adopter picks the animal up from the vet's office. The town charges \$150 prior to the adoption so they can recoup some of the money.

Chris Lamb stated she was the founder and president of CT Animal House and that she started CT Animal House to support municipal shelters in Connecticut and if an ACO calls with an medical emergency or whatever they need CT Animal House will try to provide for the animal.

Ms. Lamb agreed that spay and neutering is huge and the ACOs need to get a program for spay and neutering.

She stated she is worried about animals tied up in litigation and that it is inhumane for dogs to be in facilities for over a year. She stated the dogs go kennel crazy and it disrupts the other animals and that she wishes for the topic to be discussed to try and speed up the process.

Mr. Connors stated that there is a law that allows the municipality to take control of the animal and the owner posts a bond for the care of the animal for thirty days while it is in the shelter and if they don't pay the animal belongs to the municipality. He stated he knows which specific case Ms. Lamb is referring to and the dogs are remaining in the kennel because the owner keeps making appeals.

He also stated the Department of Agriculture presented a bill that would put it in superior court and out of their hands to make the process quicker.

Ms. Burban agrees with Mr. Connors that most ACOs don't know about the law and that the town makes her go through the attorney.

Mr. Connors stated that there was an ACO training academy meeting and they decided to make the course 96 hours meeting two times per week for six weeks.

Ms. Burban asked if there tactical training was going to be included and Mr. Connors stated that it would be.

Roz Nenninger thanked Dr. MacDonald stating that the survey should be given to all ACOs. She also stated that with the survey they will get old school v new school answers and that new school is going to have to prevail.

Ms. Nenninger agreed that they probably will only get back 20% of the surveys but the 80% is where they are going to need to focus on to make changes. She agreed with Sgt. Keller about sending the surveys to whoever is in charge of the division and that not all shelters have internet access. She would rather have a paper copy instead of a PDF.

Ms. Nenninger agrees with Sgt. Keller about the staffing and stated she is on her own most of the time. She stated she has key holders now but she has no time to run a volunteer program and that some of the dogs she has at her shelter would be dangerous to the general public.

Sgt. Keller stated that she doesn't have general public key holders because there is lots of police paper work around. CSOs are background checked and one is a police officer. She stated that all officers are key holders and that one officer goes down and takes some dogs out.

Sgt. Keller agreed with Ms. Nenninger about old school v new school and had one ACO state that the survey answers were none of the task force's business.

Ms. Nenninger stated that she liked the brochure although there were a few things that raised an eyebrow. She stated that when she does rabies clinics the town clerk brings their whole staff and they do licensing and micro chipping.

Mr. Connors commended Ms. Nenninger for turning the shelter in Wolcott around.

Mr. Freda stated that once the legislative session ends they may be able to rotate the meetings from Wednesday to Friday.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:29 PM by Michael Freda. The next general meeting will on May 6th, 2015, in the State of Connecticut Legislative Office building (LOB), 300 Capital Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106