

Task Force on Humane Treatment of animals in Municipal and Regional shelters

October 6, 2017

Members Present Paula Poplawski, Chairman Michael Freda, Laura Burban, Mark Bailey, Cynthia Theran, Officer Jim Davis(proxy for Sgt. Keller).

Members Absent: Raymond Connors, Sgt. Paula Keller, Edward O'Brien, Dr. Gayle Block

Member Introduction:

The meeting began with introductions from the members

Officer Jim Davis introduced himself as the fill-in for Sgt. Paula Keller.

Calling the Meeting to Order:

Chairman Mike Freda convened the meeting at 2:17 pm

Chairman Freda then requested an amendment to the agenda. A motion was made to amend the agenda to review the minutes from the previous meeting. The motion was made by Mark Bailey and seconded by Cynthia Theran.

Review of the Minutes:

Mark Bailey requested three revisions to the minutes there was a voice vote to approve the minutes as amended. The minutes were approved.

Chairman Freda moved onto Item 2.

Public comment on the agenda:

A member of the public stood up to testify.

Chairman Freda clarified that there would be ample time for public comment later but right now the task-force was only taking public comment relating to the agenda.

Chairman Freda moved onto item 3.

Sub-Committee Updates:

Chairman Freda stated that the sub-committees were unable to meet since the last meeting and so there were no updates.

Chairman Freda moved onto item 4.

Old Business:

Chairman Freda asked for comments from the members, with regards to the objectives of the task-force. The chairman clarified that there were some working objectives added and removed at the last meeting.

Chairman Freda moved on to item 5 on the agenda.

New Business:

Mark Bailey proposed a recommendation on the task-force sub-committee structure which was two task-forces of three members each with a chair for each sub-committee.

Laura Burban agreed with the structure she also made a suggestion that the current listing of 8 objectives be refined to have three umbrella topics with the current objectives being investigated as sub-topics. She suggested those topics be training, animal law, and enrichment. Laura suggested this would make it easier for the general public to follow the task-force's progress in fulfilling those topics and objectives.

Chairman Freda asked if this format would allow the sub-committees to reach out to outside entities that would like to contribute.

Laura Burban agreed that this format would allow for cooperation.

Mark Bailey stated his approval of the format on the basis that it would allow the sub-committees members the flexibility to research other related topics to bring before the task-force.

Cynthia Theran stated her support for Laura Burban's proposed format. She commented that it would streamline the proposals.

Chairman Freda offered to make some initial assignments to the sub-committees and check in with the absent members of the task-force to determine their interest in serving.

Laura Burban agreed with making some preliminary member assignments so that the sub-committees could begin work.

Mark Bailey agreed with this. He clarified it was important to build off the momentum of this meeting.

Laura Burban suggested Chairman Freda simply assign the sub-committee membership and responsibility to eliminate any confusion or stagnation.

Paula Poplawski stated she had some reservations about assigning the other task-force members to sub-committees without their consent.

Laura Burban stated that Chairman Freda would discuss the assignments with the members before formally assigning them.

Chairman Freda agreed to this.

Chairman Freda moved on to item 6, Subsection A.

The open forum and member feedback:

Officer Jim Davis stated that as fill-in for Sgt. Paula Keller he had some recommendations that she had written for him to present to the task-force. Officer Jim Davis read aloud Sgt. Paula Keller's recommended changes to the state's animal abuse/cruelty statutes, as well as hoarding statutes.

Officer Jim Davis provided his own opinion relating to one of the written proposals Sgt. Keller provided. He stated he agreed and felt very strongly that those arrested and convicted of animal hoarding should undergo a judge ordered mental evaluation. He stated that there is a clear and definitive mental disorder associated with hoarding behavior and it is essential for those convicted to get the help they need otherwise they are likely to offend again.

Chairman Freda asked for any immediate observations or thoughts from the members on Sgt. Keller's proposals.

Laura Burban stated she agreed with Sgt. Keller's proposal to increase the penalty in cases of extreme animal abuse to a felony charge rather than a misdemeanor.

Mark Bailey stated that the proposal was an excellent start. He questioned whether hoarding should be lumped in with animal abuse or whether that it should be a separate topic.

Cynthia Theran stated that a Massachusetts task-force as of 2015 was looking into the links between animal abuse, domestic abuse, animal cruelty, and animal hoarding. She stated this provided precedence for lumping the animal cruelty and animal hoarding.

Officer Jim Davis suggested making a mandatory reporting law for veterinarians who observe repeat or suspicious injuries to pets that may constitute a reasonable suspicion of animal abuse.

Laura Burban stated her agreement. She voiced concerns however that a veterinarian often felt that there was a certain degree of client confidentiality that made them unwilling to report suspicious injury of an animal to the police or animal control.

Cynthia Theran suggested that mandatory reporter language would provide some relief to veterinarians with that concern.

Officer Davis stated his agreement.

Chairman Freda asked for any other additional feedback or suggestions.

Mark Bailey stated that he wanted to clarify some of his comments from the last meeting. He stated that at the last meeting he suggested that the task-force investigate some of the municipal resources and structures that are currently in place. He stated that it was not his intent to create a new proposal at this time or alter any of the completed proposals that the Task-Force had produced.

Chairman Freda asked for any additional feedback or suggestions.

Mark Bailey moved on to bring up news that the Multnomah County animal shelter in Oregon (a previous contact of the Task-Force). He stated that the shelter had recently instituted new programs and training which, in a ten year period, brought their live release rate up for dogs from 71% in 2006 to 96.2% in 2016 and cats from 37.8% in 2006 to 92.5% in 2016.

Chairman Freda asked if there were any observations on that.

Laura Burban stated that she would like to provide some praise to Connecticut shelters as well because upon her investigation she found that CT is considered a no-kill state and has excellent rates of adoption for shelter animals when compared to other parts of the country. Laura suggested taking examples of programs that work in shelters here in the state and applying it to ACO training or the enrichment topic as something that is worth investigating by one of the sub-committees.

Mark Bailey made some comments about utilizing data-driven methods to improve live release rates. He mentioned that New Haven primarily has been working very hard to develop the municipal shelters live release numbers.

Laura Burban stated that the ACO for New Haven believed that much of the improvement there was due to the mandatory spay and neuter program, so the shelter is receiving fewer unwanted animals. She also stated that because of the willingness of shelters to try new programs and put themselves out there these shelters were able to make great strides in developing their program through grants.

Chairman Freda asked Laura to clarify that it was the development of new programs that led to shelters to have access to new grants.

Laura Burban stated that because the shelters made an effort to improve first, organizations and the community came forward to assist the shelter's fiscal needs.

Chairman Freda asked if it was a structural or a philosophical change that is needed to drive this improvement.

Laura Burban clarified that it was both.

Mark Bailey confirmed that it was important to create a positive atmosphere for the animals and the visitors. He also stated his agreement with Laura that when a shelter demonstrates a desire to

improve that is when national organizations start taking interest and funding through grants start becoming available.

Laura Burban suggested a “play for life” training for animal shelters which has provided some success for large municipal shelters.

Officer Jim Davis stated what he’s found successful is the shelter advertising and simply making the public aware or reminding them that the shelters have animals to adopt every week, not just during special adoption events.

Chairman Mike Freda stated that with the state government’s current budget issues and the likely cuts to town aide it is likely that municipal shelters will experience cuts and delays to infrastructure improvements. He suggested that this will make grants and other non-municipal funding very important.

Cynthia Theran brought up the importance of record keeping and statistics in showing the merits of funding shelter programs for both grant applications and continued government funding. She stated that this is especially important in demonstrating the continued success and improvement of the shelters and programs they have instituted.

Laura Burban brought up that she had researched some of the questions that came up at the last meeting. She stated that there are 168 animal control departments and 255 registered rescue operations in the state.

Laura asked whether Raymond Connors would be able to get the individual live release numbers for those 255 rescues.

Chairman Freda reported that the Connecticut Department of Agriculture keeps MACO statistics.

Mark Bailey clarified that it would require some additional investigation to determine what the live release rates are from the MACO reports since the live release rates are not recorded in those reports.

Chairman Freda stated that a few years ago the task-force looked at doing this and developed a mathematical formula to determine the individual live release rates for shelters based on the MACO reports.

Paula Poplawski voiced concerns that producing the live release rates from MACO reports was time-consuming and not the best use of the Task-Force’s efforts.

Cynthia Theran stated that although obtaining these rates are time and labor intensive it is important to produce this data to then compare these rates year to year to determine progress and show trends.

Paula Poplawski brought up the limitations of the MACO reports. She stated that MACO reports do not provide data that can easily demonstrate discernable trends or progress for shelters.

Laura Burban stated that she wanted to look at the statistics of individual shelters to discern which shelters were struggling so offers of assistance can be made.

Paula Poplawski stated that it was unfortunate that MACO reports were the only uniform reporting system across the state shelter programs. That even with the formula the task-force had developed the true live release rates were not available because of the lack of data in the MACO reports.

Cynthia Theran brought up that there were unofficial surveys being distributed by the shelters and that those may provide some better insight.

Paula Poplawski stated that using the MACO reports to provide rough estimates of the live release rates might have some benefit; however, she believed the data insufficient to provide a good picture of shelter trends.

Mark Bailey agreed that comparing the MACO reports could provide some beneficial information; however, the data provided in MACO reports were insufficient to measure real progress. He brought up that for shelters to be eligible for certain grants they needed to keep a specific monthly report on their live release rates for at minimum a year.

Paula Poplawski asked whether it would be possible to get CT shelters to fill out those reports.

Laura Burban stated that New York City animal control centers were using this method of reporting already.

Mark Bailey stated that the New Haven shelter had used this type of report in the past and found that these were not labor prohibitive to maintain. He felt shelters might willingly take on this responsibility.

Chairman Freda moved on to item 6 subsection B.

Discussion of other Collaborative relationships to make connections:

Chairman Freda stated that it was his goal by including this section that the Task-Force could perhaps consider producing a means in which the shelters, animal foster and rescue groups could operate with greater collaboration and cohesion.

Cynthia Theran stated that this goal could fit nicely within one of the sub-committee topics that were previously discussed.

Mark Bailey brought up that it was another stipulation of many grants that there be community collaboration so having that type of network may have peripheral benefits. He also brought up that he had found an online resource called outthefrontdoor.com which provides advice and funding opportunities for shelter programs around the country and could be a valuable resource.

Chairman Freda moved onto item 7.

Public Comment:

Cheryl Gagnon, Cromwell ACO, testified that euthanasia was rarely performed in municipal shelters and when it was performed it was for reasons of public safety. She also asked that the Task-Force begin looking into ACO safety and an issue.

Judy Umstead, Woodbury ACO, testified that she agreed with the Task-Force that the MACO report lacks quality data reporting. She also testified that her shelter had a 100% live release rate and that she felt on the job safety concerns of ACO's should be addressed.

Elease McConnell, Manchester ACO, reiterated that the volunteer survey which that the shelters put out found that there was a zero percent rate of euthanasia performed at municipal shelters due to space and that the major concern of the Task-Force should be ACO and public safety.

During questioning it was clarified that the shelter volunteer survey was not reflective of all shelter systems in the state. The membership of the committee expressed interest in seeing what shelters did participate in the survey. Elease McConnell stated she could make that information available.

Adjournment:

Chairman Freda asked for a motion to adjourn. The motion was made and seconded.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:58 pm.