

ANIMAL SHELTER COMMISSION MINUTES FOR MEETING HELD THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2023

- A. **CALL TO ORDER** – the meeting was called to order at 5:22 pm
- B. **ROLL CALL of Commissioners** – In attendance: Anna Accetta; Cherie Aronson; Colby Collier; Cathy Kamen; Susan Stanek. Also in attendance: Lt. Luke Holder; ACO Scott Ellingson. Staff: Susan LaFond, Recording Secretary
- C. **PUBLIC COMMENTS** - Larla Wirtz, a shelter volunteer, spoke. She is a special education teacher who works to bring her students to the shelter once a week. She does not believe the dogs are getting outside enough or getting sufficient exercise. She said this lack of exercise is not helping the dogs get adopted. They can develop 'kennel syndrome' which is extreme stress and anxiety, making them overwhelming when meeting the public. She said many people she speaks with express an interest in volunteering. She is encouraged that the animals' comfort is being made a priority with the passing of the new state law regarding temperature controls. When she visits the shelter, she sees unused space which could be made into an inside play area and couch time area, which is important for socializing the dogs. She knows money and politics play a role in what happens within City departments. Her volunteering started when she found a dog, Russell, in April. Now, when she visits him, she sees he is bleeding every time, because his nails are so long and sharp, he is scratching himself and drawing blood. She said their basic needs are not being met. She mentioned Spice and Reggie who have been there a very long time. She said she believes the Milford community is not happy with how the shelter is run, and with the rude employees at the shelter. She brought documentation of how potential volunteers have been treated rudely or turned away. She described incidents with both Luralton Hall staff and Girl Scouts of Milford who have reached out to volunteer but have received no response. She has a special needs teacher with volunteers available, but that individual has not heard back on her volunteer request. She said she knows volunteers who have showed up in person to walk a dog who have been turned away, being advised a phone call is necessary before arriving. She has washed some of the dogs herself that were in need. She has a groomer who will help cut the dogs' nails and perform other grooming tasks if they are allowed to do so. She said she knows there are people coming to see Reggie on the 20th and may have someone interested in Spice.

Chairman Collier said he agreed with Ms. Wirtz on all accounts. He appreciated her taking the time to come to speak to the commission. He likes the idea of an indoor pen or socialization area. Ms. Stanek thanked her as well, and said the commission continues to attempt to make positive change. Ms. Stanek agrees the animals are suffering. Ms. Stanek said she came on the commission to become an advocate for the animals.

Ms. Kamen said she reads comments on social media that echo Ms. Wirtz' concerns. She sees a need for the process to be made clearer, as some of the public who have signed up for volunteering believe someone from animal control will reach out to them and invite them to walk dogs on specific days.

Ms. Accetta said she always calls ahead before she comes in to work with the cats.

Lt. Holder suggests a discussion regarding volunteers, under New Business.

- D. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES** – 9/11/23
Motion to approve by Ms. Stanek; second by Ms. Kamen. Passed unanimously.
- E. **CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT** – Chair Collier spoke at the Milford Boards & Commissions Open House last evening, on behalf of the animal commission. He advised people interested in volunteering with the shelter or joining the commission on the paths to do so.
- F. **TREASURER'S REPORT** – Ms. Accetta reported the available balance of unallocated contingency is \$174,012 as of October 6, 2023. Cash donations totaled \$318 for the month. She reported allocated but unused funds: \$2000 for a washer and dryer. Over \$7000 in the welfare fund for medical fees. \$2160 earmarked for rabies vaccines in the feral cats program.
- G. **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Building Improvement Subcommittee: Ms. Kamen reported she followed up with Mr. Saley to emphasize we need his help to get building improvements moving. ACO Ellingson reported he advised Mr. Saley he is offering \$255K from the Orange funds to public works for climate control. He has not been given a quote by public works on the cost, but due to new Connecticut state statutes regarding maximum allowable kennel temperatures, the work must be done before next summer. ACO Ellingson must set aside the remaining funds for a new vehicle and employee overtime. The ACO budget will receive \$100K a year going forward for managing Orange Animal Control. Lt. Holder said the air conditioning for the gym at the Simon Lake facility cost \$40K as an idea of cost. Discussion about putting money toward climate control of an old building that needs renovation may

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be wasting funds; Lt. Holder said we cannot let the perfect be the enemy of the good and that investing in a system for the building we have now is the right action.

Grooming Subcommittee: Chair Collier wants to allocate funds for nail clipping by a groomer on an as needed basis. Ms. Kamen spoke with Jackie at the Dogfather Mobile Grooming and found them to be very nice and accommodating. For the city, they would provide grooming at a discounted rate of \$100 per dog for bath, nails, and ear cleaning. This service is normally \$175-\$200; if a dog is found to have fleas, the cost will be \$250. They agreed to provide the city with a W-9 form for tax purposes. They are willing to wait for payments and would even bill the city on a twice per year basis. She believes ACO Ellingson would be able to contact Dogfather and request grooming that would accommodate animal control's schedule. Each grooming will take 30-90 minutes and be performed in their van in the animal control parking lot. Discussion regarding opening a new Grooming account and moving funds from the unallocated contingency specifically for that purpose.

Red Cross Training: Ms. Kamen said the Red Cross holds frequent 2-hour classes in CPR and using an AED at their Milford location. Kaitlin at the Red Cross believes she can assist the commission in purchasing an AED. ACO Ellingson reported that he will need training, but Mr. Farrar is certified. The decision was made to wait until the new hire is on board so everyone can get their certification at once. ACO Ellingson said the last information he had about the city considering purchasing an AED for animal control was that it would not happen until "after Parsons Complex."

- H. **WARDEN'S REPORT** - ACO Ellingson distributed copies of the monthly report and included changes to the Connecticut state statute regarding temperatures within an animal control facility. The new temperature range is between 55 and 80 degrees. Motion to approve by Ms. Stanek; Ms. Accetta seconded. Approved unanimously.
- I. **DEPARTMENT REPORT** – Dogs: Spice, Reggie, Russell, and Lazlo are still up for adoption. Petey, the Cane Corso, was adopted. Coral, a Lab/Pittie mix was brought in as a transfer from Hamden and quickly adopted. Reese, a friendly, grey and white pit was just neutered today; will be able to be walked starting tomorrow. He was a sign-over from a neglect case. One more dog from Orange, black pit, terrified and aggressive, no name yet. ACO Ellingson working on evaluation. No one has claimed him. Had one dog whose rabies vaccine was not up to date, that killed a possum; possum came back negative for rabies and owners picked up today.
- Cats: Four kittens were adopted; one black kitten remains from the F group; hisses but allows being picked up. Two cats from Barnes and Noble are still available. Jessicas Rescue adopted the juvenile with neurological issues, whose mouth and tongue are moving better. It was determined the cat is mostly blind as well. Monkey, the mother cat from Caswell Cove, is still at the shelter. Her kittens are going to the vet next week for shots and will be weaned and ready for adoption soon. Two more adult cats from Caswell Cove were brought in through the feral cat program; Jessica's Rescue will be taking them, and Jerry as well. Ms. Kamen asked about medical costs. ACO Ellingson said Milford Animal Control is responsible for all medical costs until an animal is adopted. He said his budget contains \$10K per year for medical care which can be seriously depleted by just one injured animal. Ms. Kamen feels Milford Animal Control should be compensating rescues that take animals off our hands. ACO Ellingson said that is a possibility if a W-9 is received. The Commission donated \$500 to Barnum Animal Hospital in the past. \$6748 currently in Other Medical Fees and Services for the remainder of this fiscal year. Desmond's Army was mentioned as being helpful in the past.
- J. **CORRESPONDENCE** Donations of \$318 received for the month.
- K. **NEW BUSINESS**
- 1) Discussion of Budget and Purchase Order process – Lt. Holder distributed copies of a draft purchase order to commission members. He spoke about the commission budget and purchasing process. Said commission will be most effective by creating purchase orders for any items voted on and approved. The commission needs to decide which person or persons will be charged with creating the purchase orders; he recommends one person. He said it is unclear whether POs will go through ACO Ellingson, or him, at this time. ACO Ellingson reminded the commission that finance will need a W-9 and exact quote from each vendor. Ms. Kamen asked if she could create a purchase order for the previously approved microwave. This process will allow donated, unallocated funds to be used as approved. Finance will also require a copy of the meeting minutes showing the commission vote to spend the funds, and the dollar limit, along with the purchase order. Going forward, the Treasurer's report will include funds spent. Motion to create an account specifically for Dog Grooming, with initial funding of \$10k, made by Ms. Kamen. Ms. Accetta seconded; passed unanimously.
 - 2) Volunteers: Lt. Holder recommend the commission put together and pay for printing of informational booklet/handout for volunteers, including the message that we don't want to waste a volunteer's time or turn a volunteer away because a process was not followed. ACO Ellingson can digitize the current volunteer packet and send it out to the commission members, and Ms. Kamen said she can upgrade the packet. ACO Ellingson said the packet must include a waiver of

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liability. Lt. holder said maybe a refrigerator magnet with the basics could be created. Ms. Stanek feels that is just pushing paper. Further discussion regarding lack of exercise for the dogs. ACO Ellingson said there was a volunteer, Johnny, who was coming virtually every day; Johnny has now gotten a job and is no longer available. Lt. Holder said the police department management are fully in support of the limitations ACO Ellingson has put on volunteers and he understands the frustration, but the limitations are there for legitimate reasons. He further stated that even with a third person there will still be limitations. Chair Collier said he volunteered at Ridgefield animal shelter, and they were washing cages at 7am; wanted to know if animal control could do the same. ACO Ellingson said the new hire will be starting at 7am but needed to be trained. ACO Ellingson said dog walking hours are from 11:00 am and 4:30 pm. Lt. Holder said we must remember volunteers are there to assist the mission and job of ACO. At times they can create more work than help; they need to be able to work around the normal functioning of the shelter. Chair Collier disagreed. Ms. Stanek again voiced an office member continues to be a negative force. Chair Collier said we should be catering to the animals' comfort, not the comfort of the employees. Lt. Holder again said he defers to ACO Ellingson. He said if we can alleviate frustration and confusion for volunteer, the revised booklet/handout is a good first step. Come during volunteer hours and we will accommodate you. Chair Collier agrees there should be a fixed schedule but disagrees that we need to stick to what is happening now. Ms. Kamen questioned whether it was acceptable for dogs not to get out of their kennels for several days in a row. Lt. Holder said there will be changes when we get the new officer on board and trained. ACO Ellingson said one positive change will be that the shelter will be open again for volunteers and adoptions on Saturdays.

L. OLD BUSINESS

- 1) Facility Improvement Recommendations and Prioritization – discussed under Committee Reports
- 2) Hiring of Animal Control staff - there were 20 applicants, 10 of which are prequalified. Testing of the applicants will occur October 23. Once test results are reviewed, interviews will be scheduled.
- 3) Dog grooming – discussed under Committee Reports

M. ADJOURNMENT – meeting adjourned at 7:00 pm.

Submitted by: S. R. LaFond, Recording Secretary 10/13/23.