

ANIMAL CONTROL COMMISSION

Minutes of the Regular Meeting

April 7, 2008

A regular meeting of the Fairbanks North Star Borough Animal Control Commission was held in the Borough Assembly Chambers, 809 Pioneer Road, Fairbanks, Alaska. Ronnie Rosenberg, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ronnie Rosenberg, Chair
Shellie Severa, Vice-Chair
Karen Wilson
Kathryn Cardarelle
Shirley Harris
Mary Ann Fortune

GUESTS PRESENT:

Sandy Klimaschesky
Patrick Streeter

ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT:

Matt Ruger, Animal Control Manager

The agenda for this meeting was unanimously approved with no objection. The draft minutes of the March 10, 2008 meeting were not available for approval. The Chair noted that after this meeting the quota of six meetings per year would be fulfilled; however, the mayor has envisioned the commission being more active and making more suggestions, particularly about making changes to the ordinance and changes in policies, and so if there is the will among the group to do that we may or may not need additional meetings over the summer.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

MANAGER'S REPORT:

Matt Ruger presented the Manager's Report (attached).

There was discussion regarding training for new staff members. Euthanasia by Injection (EBI) training is scheduled for Friday, April 11, conducted by the same person from the American Humane Society that did the training in October, 2006. It was intended to be a statewide training opportunity but a communication problem within the Alaska Animal Control Association spoiled those plans when they failed to notify their members. Since bringing one trainer to Alaska is cheaper than sending four people out, Matt will pay the \$800 fee plus travel expenses and conduct the training as planned. The training will be moved from Pioneer Park to the shelter break room and if any last-minute attendees show up for the class they'll be charged the standard class tuition to help defray the cost. The new full-time animal tender will also attend the training if hired by then.

Ronnie Rosenberg asked if all of the tenders would have the training. Ruger replied that all of the full-time tenders and the new ACO will be trained.

Ruger noted that the mayor's budget for next year cut training by 10 percent and eliminated transportation funds for next year so Ruger is trying to get as much training done this year as possible or, if the classes needed aren't offered until next fiscal year, obligate this year's funds for it until they are spent out.

Rosenberg noted that if a change in the tax cap gets approved by the voters there may be some "scary" changes in budgets. She asked if there would be changes to the rabies clinic fees and Ruger said he didn't know.

Old Business

The shelter software selection committee held a teleconference with interested vendors on March 18th to answer any questions they may have. This afternoon the committee met to look at their proposals. The proposals will be reviewed, scored and—hopefully—a vendor will be selected and the new software can be scheduled for installation. The program will be installed remotely and a week of on-site training will follow. One of the requirements was that the program selected must be a tried-and-true program in use by at least 20 shelters. All of the submissions meet that requirement.

Rosenberg asked if there been any increase in volunteers or people willing to foster underage animals or anything from the concerned citizens that came to the last meeting. **Ruger** said none of the attendees of the last meeting have volunteered to help since the meeting; however, one person who has been an outspoken critic in his letters to the editor, etc., did visit and Ruger and the lead animal tender spent a couple of hours showing him around and showing him the operations. He seems to have moderated his criticism substantially since then and has actually said good things about the shelter and what it's doing. He stated that's generally the case: "When people come and spend time at Animal Control and we can talk to them so they understand what we are doing they are impressed. Too many people take other people's word for it without getting it from the horse's mouth, i.e. myself or the staff, so these rumors take off and run like they're fact."

MaryAnn Fortune stated that she wanted to make a personal comment about the last meeting. "I really felt so positive about that large group coming forward. I thought that it would lay a foundation for people to understand that the Division of Animal Control is doing the best it can to use itself as a shelter and try and get these animals adopted out that we are in need of foster homes for, or offer to come and get these animals out and help get them adopted. I am truly amazed that it got built up and then got dropped."

Rosenberg stated, "That's a lot of what we've got going on. One of these individuals was walking around (in the shelter) making a list and writing down cage numbers. I said, 'What are you doing?' She said, 'I'm making a list of the animals because I want to know which ones are going to be on the euth list.' It was a day I knew that no one was going on the list that day so I said, 'Let me show you the animals that have been here a long time' and I showed her where to see the dates they came in, and the ones that were not at all social, the ones that were old, and said, 'Would you be able to take one of these? Either adopt it or foster it or even walk it?' They weren't killer dogs or anything; they were dogs and cats that weren't going to move for the

public, older ones that were not housebroken, sled dogs that won't run and that sort of thing. She said, 'That would be too sad.' I told her I have several animals like this (at home); could you take just one? 'We will get it all fixed up as far as spayed or neutered so you won't have to pay for that.' She said she was going to check back to see which ones had been euthanized.

Shellie Severa: I take it she didn't take one?

Rosenberg: No, or foster or adopt or even just walk a dog.

Matt: We have a lot of people that talk but aren't willing to be part of the solution. It's easy to throw stones at people who are doing their best but they don't want to get involved other than to complain about what someone else is doing.

Kathryn Cardarelle: I agree with Mary Ann because it gave us the opportunity to set the record straight. The last committee meeting we had someone came in who said she wanted to be here tonight, I don't see her. She said, "I'm afraid to let my dog go loose because I was told that if it was picked up by Animal Control it would be euthanized that same day (within 3 hours)". She was satisfied by the end of the meeting and said, "I guess I've been misinformed and would like to support the Animal Shelter". She was told that she would be notified and if she didn't pick it up within 3 hours it would be dead. That's what's nice about public comments; whether it's controversial or not it's a matter of public record.

Matt: I was looking forward to the last meeting because I knew there would be citizens attending and I felt good about that because it was an opportunity to let people know the truth. I felt it was a positive thing afterwards but the big letdown was, and it's been a month now, that with the exception of the misunderstanding of the one person who thought we would no longer call her to rescue—that was a communication problem that was worked out and we are in contact with her again—there was nothing as far as the other folks are concerned. That's been disappointing but like with this gentleman, an outspoken critic—we spent about 2 ½ hours with him and gave him the \$150 tour—when I can talk to them to at least neutralize them and make them see the other side of the coin, then it's worth it.

Shirley Harris: Hopefully some of the people that were at the last meeting will speak up when someone says we're going to put your dog down and inform other people.

Ronnie: It depends on the person's motive. There are some people that are angry and distort, and then it becomes like the game of telephone when it passes 5 different people so you get the distortion.

Fortune asked if anyone has applied to be a commissioner.

Rosenberg said there was one that she knows of. She went on to state that in her meeting with the Mayor (more on that later) she told him that if we are going to do the things he would like then we need a full commission. We have three vacant slots and we need people with different gifts and talents on the commission to do what he envisions and that she needs help. She has already asked everyone that she thinks would be good and thought that many of the commissioners have done the same. The mayor said he would bring it up at the directors' meeting so they can brainstorm and expand the circle. Many of us know animal people but they (the directors) can bring it to the attention of other members of the public. As to the application received, she is familiar with the applicant but doesn't know her very well. She has

good board experience. Rosenberg has talked to people on boards that she has served on and she was hardworking and conscientious and a strategic thinker.

There was further conversation about the lack of interest in volunteers to fill the vacant commission seats and the difficulties it sometimes poses in achieving a quorum when all of the current members can't attend a meeting. The problem is especially taxing during the summer when people are trying to take time away and a special meeting is necessary. Improvement of the overall treatment of animals in the Borough—and not just a focus on the shelter itself—requires committed people and groups to raise awareness and interest in productive, meaningful ways. Currently there seems to be very few groups committed to that. In the meantime, the commissioners will continue to petition qualified friends and acquaintances to apply for commission seats.

The conversation then turned to the Facilities Committee and their progress putting together the initial assessment and recommendations for a strategic vision of Animal Control and its facilities in the face of major budgetary and population changes. The discussion briefly turned to communication between commissioners and how/when that communication becomes a violation of the public meetings requirements. Any communication needs to go through Matt and be available for public review if not presented at a commission meeting. Rosenberg recommended minimizing any communications of that type in order to avoid inadvertently running afoul of the law. Matt can collect information and input from commissioners and hold it for discussion at the next meeting; however, communication through him is also illegal. He can collect and hold input for public discussion later. The next Facilities Committee meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, May 7, at 5:30 pm in the Chizmar Room. The committee will continue to meet through the summer. The commission and Ruger will also work with the Director of Emergency Operations to find Borough-owned land to earmark as a possible future site for a new shelter.

New Business

Rosenberg stated she met with the Mayor and Chief of Staff a couple of weeks ago to discuss the shelter and how it was functioning. The Mayor stated he would like to see the commission become more proactive in bringing issues forward and she told him she couldn't speak for everyone but was pretty sure more staffing was needed. She feels at least one of the tenders needs to be cross-trained to fill in at the front desk and another officer is needed: there used to be six but there are only five now providing service six days per week. The public complains because only Priority 1 and 2 calls can be answered promptly. The Mayor encouraged us (the committee) to bring it before the Assembly. At the same time the Mayor and Assembly are very concerned about property taxes going up and high fuel and gas prices. With the sales tax defeated everyone is waiting to hear from Juneau and proposing hold-the-line budgets so this is not a year for increases in personnel and some departments are not even filling vacant positions. The tax cap comes up for a revote in the municipal election. The Interior Taxpayers Association (ITA) got their initiative certified, so that if it passes growth of the Borough will no longer be a factor. According to Community Planning we are #30 in the U.S. in terms of growth in the last few years and more people means more animals. If this tax cap initiative passes it will stop any percentage multiplier to the tax cap and, the way the ITA people crafted it, when people vote it won't be a choice between the old tax cap or the new one; it will be the new one or none, because no one had a competing initiative and the Assembly didn't come forth with anything in a timely manner. People like the tax cap and may be nervous without it. The Mayor is concerned that we could end up like the City of Fairbanks where we have to have emergency

elections and that kind of thing when they can't pay the bills. While it's not our job to go lobby we are a non-profit organization and we can definitely take very strong stands on these sorts of issues either as individuals or as a commission. She stated as it gets closer to election time in October the commission should band together. The School District does and the Visitor's Association will say, "Look at how this will affect what we care about", and social services. Non-profits are very worried about the impact this will have on the community and these are the sorts of things we need to be aware of and working on. The Assembly is very reluctant to add any additions since that will be a hot political football so the fallback is casual hours. However, when I brought that up I was told Animal Control didn't use them last time. Rosenberg assured them the hours will be used one way or another whether it's for training or public education or whatever.

Ruger stated he didn't know what they meant by that—that the casual hours were used last year. This year we're not where we should be for this time of year because he has been budgeting them to cover potential overtime because he ran out of overtime money last year due to previous cuts and doesn't want to run into the same issues this year.

Rosenberg: You're damned if you do and damned if you don't.

Ruger: I wasn't 80% spent out at budget time so they think I'm not going to use it all but, one way or the other, I am.

Rosenberg: I told them if we couldn't have more positions we need major casual hours. I want to go into those budget hearings asking for 4,500 hours. You (speaking to Ruger) don't have to do that because the commission can do that. One of the things that scare me is if we have a disaster again such as a boundary fire or something that uses up a lot of overtime. If there's not flexibility in the budget it's not going to be good. If we could, we would get some of these people (volunteers), but they aren't reliable (in an emergency). The additional hours will allow for full funding of the four casual tenders already approved and addition of an Admissions Clerk casual to assist the front desk which is critically understaffed.

The question arose as to whether the commissioners can lobby the Assembly as individuals and **Rosenberg** noted they can. "The Mayor is looking for us to act independently because he's looking for some backing. He's looking for some citizen's to come forth. There are organized groups like the ITA and then there's everybody else who is just sort of out there. If we could fill the room with people saying, 'This is what we want' we might have more luck." The conversation then turned to various ways the commission and other interested people can make an effective statement and be heard at the budget hearings. Foremost, numbers speak and this year shelter supporters need to turn out in larger numbers than in the past. "We have the most friendly Assembly that we could possibly have but they are very concerned about the cost of gas, etc." Juneau hasn't closed out the state budget yet. That's happening within the next couple of weeks, then the School District will know exactly what they're getting—that's the big major spending thing—then they will know whether it's good news or bad news and everything else kind of flows around that.

Fortune: When people start paying more for gas and fuel and electricity they cannot afford animals.

Rosenberg: We have Fairview Manor starting to close this summer. I suggested to some of the Critter Alliance people that that might be a nice community project for all these rescue

groups to start working on now; to get fliers out and find out how many have animals. These are low-income renters. Where are they going to go and how many animals are living there now?

The conversation turned again to the budget and **Ruger** noted the Borough training budget has been cut 10% across the board and travel money was deleted. **Rosenberg** stated that, if necessary, the Fund can get mileage or a mileage ticket to bring someone up here. "We have donors that have lots of air miles that would give us a ticket." **Ruger** added that the Virkon foamer was approved but the money to replace the officers' expired ballistic vests was disapproved so, since they were necessary safety items, he would need to find another way to finance them. Overall, he noted, the budget hits weren't as bad as they could have been. **Rosenberg** noted that, if necessary, the Shelter Fund may be able to "do some trading" for the vests and purchase a second foamer, if necessary.

The status of the Title 6 revision was then briefly mentioned with Ruger noting the draft was done and forwarded up his chain of command for review and **Rosenberg** noting the Mayor "would like to see things come forward. I told him we would like flexibility to offer specials such as two-for-one cat month or black cat month if we have too many black cats, or senior dog day, things like that to try to move animals. A lot of that is just a fee thing. He said to call Bob if we want to do things like that. I talked to him about the rescue contract and the thing with insurance."

A short conversation followed about the new rescue organization contract and Risk Management's question of insurance—whether it should be required or not—and the ongoing discussion concerning that. Currently, Risk is looking at the insurance market to find out what's available in Alaska before a final decision will be made. The bottom line is that everyone wants a strong, workable contract—which this one is—to bring as many legitimate rescue organizations as possible into partnership with the shelter. Once the insurance question is answered the process should move on. **Rosenberg** added that the Mayor's office is fully behind efforts to expand the animal foster program.

The conversation then turned to the shelter's free owner-requested euthanasia service and its pros and cons. **Ruger** noted that it is one of the programs that Animal Control gets nothing but compliments about, is a valuable service and promotes goodwill across the community. At the same time, **Rosenberg** noted that it is a tremendous drain of staff time and, perhaps, there should be a nominal charge. It was decided to add a note at the bottom of the Owner Request for Euthanasia form asking patrons if they would like to make a voluntary contribution to the Shelter Fund to assist in the purchase of items to enhance animal care at the shelter. **Ruger** also noted that the impact on unexpected staff workloads has been reduced by going from a daylong walk-in service to a 2:30 – 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday service.

The conversation returned to the budget and staffing and **Ruger** noted that with the sixth ACO position unfilled it has had a major impact on the whole operation. Since, due to their pay grade, ACOs are the only staff trained in all of the other positions they also fill in at the front desk, Dispatch, and in the kennel area as needed when other staff members are sick or on vacation. If an ACO is on vacation or sick too, the domino effect often means only one ACO is available for patrol and, occasionally, has created situations where the only calls that could be run during the business day were Priority 1s. **Rosenberg** noted that this was a contributor to the lack of timely service she'd noted earlier and it "is not good" and the request for additional casual hours is "not going to get you *good* service but it will be at least semi-manageable so

you won't get complaints." **Ruger** noted that most complaints are on Mondays because there is only one person at the front desk and an ACO serving as dispatcher, so patrol response and customer service for visitors are both less than what he wants to be able to provide and what the public expects. After taking a voice count, **Rosenberg** noted consensus among the commissioners to move ahead with the push for the additional casual hours and efforts to get more attendance by credible citizens at the budget hearings.

The possibility of meeting mid-summer to review Title 6 after the Director's review was discussed and tentatively approved. If necessary, it was asked, can commissioners participate by phone if unable to physically attend a special meeting due to travel. Rosenberg said she had asked about that once and was told "no" but would ask again. The potential for "daisy chain" emails among commissioners could become a problem that had already been addressed in the past.

Commissioner Comments / Announcements:

Harris: I have a question about the section in the News-Miner where it says "Around the Borough" where they list meetings and stuff, maybe I missed it but I haven't seen the Animal Control Commission meetings in there.

Ruger: I notify the clerk's office and they do the publicity. They have a schedule. Animal Control doesn't do that.

Harris: The Road Service Area Commission meeting is even listed.

Ronnie: There is a time frame that they do them, I do know that. She then asked each commissioner if they had further comments.

Cardarelle: Thank you for clarifying that (owner-requested) euthanasia bit. I think hearing the actual tenders speak—although you did a nice job too Matt—was helpful. I've been in that room with you and I know it's pretty tough.

Rosenberg: My only comment is that (with the help of the Shelter Fund) we have sent a lot of animals out to the vet so that has worked pretty well this month. Usually we have a couple of big cases; what we've had in the last month is lots of smaller cases. A lot of these animals have had expenses between \$300 and \$900. We had only one over \$1,000, but a lot over the \$200 limit that have moved on to adoptive homes.

Barring any special meetings, the next commission meeting is set for whenever we have something to look at on Title 6.

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:40 PM.

Submitted by Janice Vanderheiden for Matt Ruger

August 27, 2008