

ANIMAL CONTROL COMMISSION

Minutes of the Regular Meeting

October 27, 2008

A regular meeting of the Fairbanks North Star Borough Animal Control Commission was held at the Borough Administrative Center Chizmar Room at 809 Pioneer Road, Fairbanks, Alaska. Ronnie Rosenberg, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ronnie Rosenberg, *Chair*
Shellie Severa, *Vice Chair*
Mary Ann Fortune
Jamie Marschner
Karen Wilson

GUESTS PRESENT:

Margaret Dodge
Sandy Klimaschesky
Pat Streeter

ABSENT:

None

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, April 7 and June 2 (special) meetings were approved with no corrections. The September 22, 2008 meeting did not have a quorum and thus no minutes requiring approval were generated. The Chair noted that a Post-It note was left on the BAC door by a citizen who arrived for the meeting at 6:00 p.m. and no one was present. She asked to be contacted so she could attend the next meeting. Rosenberg stated she would make contact. (Note: It was discovered that the wrong time was posted in the Daily News-Miner and the problem was corrected. The time listed in the Public Notices section of the FNSB website was correct.)

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

MANAGER'S REPORT:

Matt Ruger presented the Manager's Report.

Over the summer there was a complete turnover of front desk staff. The Senior Secretary resigned and was replaced by one of the two benefitted Admissions Clerks, a new benefitted and a new casual Admissions Clerk were hired and Ruger is interviewing eight people from a pool of 45 applicants for the vacated clerk position this week. There was also one new benefitted tender hired since the last regular commission meeting.

The two newest animal control officers completed the National Animal Control Academy (NACA I & II) last month.

Animal Control will be sponsoring Euthanasia by Injection (EBI) and Compassion Fatigue (CF) training again in April, 2009. Due to the difficulty getting the word out through the state association Animal Control will be contacting their counterparts in the rest of the state themselves in addition to the posting on the American Humane Association (AHA) website and mailings. Ruger is also in the process of getting Shelter Operations training on the books for September 28 – October 1, 2009—one two-day class for staff and one two-day class for managers.

The annual rabies clinic was held on Sunday, September 28th, at Pioneer Park. The final numbers came to 542 pre-registered and 222 walk-in animals for a total of 764. The staff was a little dejected that the numbers were down from last year until Ruger reminded them that of roughly 1,100 animals last year over 400 belonged to mushers. Since those dogs—representing the majority of their teams—won't come due for shots again until 2010 the numbers were actually a little higher than Ruger expected. Most of the dogs brought by mushers were new replacements and additions to teams already vaccinated last year.

There is a recurring problem since early last spring with dogs at the Farmers' Loop/UAF transfer site. Of approximately 12-15 dogs, Animal Control was able to trap three before people started feeding them and springing the traps. Homeward Bound has stepped up and volunteered to assist with watching traps in an attempt to catch the rest before the cold weather sets in.

The euthanasia rate continues to decline. As of today the rate is 13.08% (excluding owner-requested) and, unless the economy starts affecting people's ability to keep their pets, the shelter is poised to end the year with its third decline in as many years. The number one reason for euthanasia is still temperament / behavior and the number of animals euthanized for illness and space continues to drop, thanks to stringent disease control practices as well as committed rescues and foster homes. There has also been an increase in people interested in fostering and rescuing animals.

The shelter Volunteer of the Quarter for April – June was Myles Manning. He's been volunteering at the shelter 3 to 5 days per week for over a year. He has contributed greatly to the care and welfare of our animals and has become part of the shelter family.

Barry Jennings resigned as Director of Emergency Operations effective October 10th. The application deadline for his replacement is next week and, in the meantime, Ruger is reporting directly to the mayor's chief of staff.

On September 22nd Ruger began his fourth year as manager. He stated it's been interesting and he looks forward to the next three being as productive as the first three.

Officers Streeter, Bailey, and Paquette as well as the Lead Tender and Ruger received Chemical Immobilization of Animals and Advanced Immobilization Field Techniques September 30 – October 3rd. The training included techniques and practices to safely and humanely dart and transport animals as well as rudimentary field first aid and emergency care of animals. On that subject, it was noted that Rosenberg has been trying to find a vendor for net guns and they are no longer being stocked. State agencies and organizations have likewise been unable to give her a good contact number for stocking vendors.

Ruger received training from AHA in Animal Emergency Services & Animal Emergency Sheltering in Anchorage October 17th – 18th.

The shelter management software contract has been awarded and signed. HLP, Inc. (Chameleon) was the winner. There is a possible SQL server issue being worked by computer services and, once that issue is resolved, the program will be converted and the staff trained during the first two weeks of December. If the issue cannot be corrected by the borough without buying SQL Server Rosenberg said to let her know and she will try to find some funding sources since Ruger has already had to cover some other unfunded surprises.

Rosenberg asked if there has been any luck fostering underage puppies that come in without a mother. Ruger stated there have not been that many come in and Klimaschesky stated the shelter is now in the business of raising underage animals. She stated there has been a litter of kittens there with their mother for several weeks nearing adoption age as well as a pit bull and her four pups. The dogs went out to a foster for one day then were brought back. Another cat came in with kittens today with no takers so far and one dog came in with 12 puppies and Golden Retriever Rescue took them all. Long story short, the foster program isn't working very well for underage animals. Now that the ordinance has been changed to allow Animal Control the option of fostering underage animals in lieu of automatically euthanizing them, the citizens who raised the issue and insisted that the manager be given the option of fostering underage animals have not stepped up to the plate and offered any substantial help. The result has been that much-needed space is tied up for weeks by animals that aren't going anywhere while others get euthanized.

Fortune noted that at least the option has been given to Ruger to use his discretion where before he didn't have any but he can still euthanize underage animals if he chooses to. Since that was happening before, nothing has changed much. She also noted that she predicted when the ordinance was changed that it "wouldn't bring numbers of people coming in, unfortunately" to help "but at least it gives us the option" so it's still a big plus to be able to do that even though it's not changing the euthanasia numbers much.

Klimaschesky noted that the high numbers of puppies without developed immune systems being kept in the puppy room puts the other animal at higher risk—even according to the consulting vet—but who doesn't like puppies and kittens?

Rosenberg also made note of the inordinate amount of time needed to care for them that takes away from the other animals needing attention.

Ruger also noted it is a psychological thing. "The ordinance said to do it so we did it. Now we have the option and it's very difficult to look at a litter of puppies and decide 'today we're going to euthanize these puppies'. Before it was a matter of the ordinance saying 'you're going to do it' so we did it. It's more personal now going in and looking at these little guys and saying 'today's your day' and nobody wants to do that."

Klimaschesky: The frustration is higher because we know we have the option and there's nobody to take them.

Ruger: And it only takes one person to say "they're still euthanizing puppies" for it to get turned around and turned into another anti-Animal Control thing.

Fortune: Those people are always going to be around. I've given up trying to please them.

Rosenberg asked about the volunteers. Are they being productively utilized, getting along and doing what they need to do? It was noted there are two types of volunteers: normal citizens volunteering their time and community service workers (CSWs) there by court order. Klimaschesky noted they are trained and utilized differently since CSWs are there for a specific number of hours while regular volunteers have long-term potential. CSWs are more tightly controlled and scheduled. There has also been an increase in volunteers due in part, it appears, to the military deployments leaving spouses with more time on their hands and wanting to get out and do something to keep busy. The challenge is to keep them motivated to continue coming back because Sundays and Mondays are the targeted days when the most help is needed. There haven't been any complaints or concerns by or about the volunteers to Klimaschesky or Ruger.

Rosenberg asked if there were any more questions for staff. Although there weren't, Fortune thanked Klimaschesky for attending.

Rosenberg then moved on to a resolution thanking resigned commissioners Kathryn Cardarelle and Shirley Harris for their service. It was decided unanimously to send them both thank-you notes from the commission.

Old Business

Rosenberg noted there are still four vacancies on the commission. She stated she had spoken to Legal and the Clerk's office and since the majority of the nine authorized commissioners must be present to hold a regular or special meeting, all five current commissioners must be present to have a quorum (for bite hearings only three would be needed). Therefore, if one commissioner is sick or absent or out of town there's not a quorum and the meeting has to be canceled or rescheduled. Prior to Barry resigning she had discussed with him a revision of Title 6 (a revised copy of which was still on his desk for review when he resigned) to change the requirement from "nine" to "six to nine" to allow for a quorum for times like this. A range would allow for greater flexibility for mayoral appointments and when defining a quorum. Additionally, she reminded those present to encourage interested and qualified people they know to apply to the mayor's office.

New Business

Ruger provided a quarterly summary of the budget for the commission to look at to determine if there are areas where there are variances way over or way under the target numbers. He noted that in Personnel Services he doesn't have control over the numbers other than overtime and casual hours, both of which are on target. Commodities and Contractual Services are the areas he has direct control over and this time of the year he should be around 25 percent spent in those areas. He is on target for most of those areas with the exception of Office Supplies, Computer Supplies, Clothing and Personal Supplies, Professional Services, Training, Building Maintenance and Profession Services. He noted that Clothing and Personal Supplies is over since he had to purchase new protective vests for the officers to replace their expired ones which cost \$3,200 of the budgeted \$4,200. Ruger noted safety is paramount and anything

impacting people's safety is his first priority. Office Supplies is only 14.16 percent spent but that number is deceiving since office supplies are bought in large quantities just a few times per year and just one trip can drive the number to 50 percent. Computer Supplies is used primarily for service calls so that will maintain a full balance until needed; so far there has been no service required. Books and Periodicals is underspent since purchases are being postponed in case some of the money needs to be used for clothing to offset the purchase of the vests. Building Maintenance and Other Maintenance are for building and equipment repairs and governed by what breaks. That money is drafted by Building Maintenance and Transit as needed to cover expenses. Professional Services looks overspent because approximately a third of it is budgeted for the consulting veterinarian's contract and that is encumbered all at once at the beginning of the year. Rosenberg noted that vet services was a concern last year and Ruger noted there had been end-of-year expenses he had anticipated that didn't come up and other expenditures that fell through leaving a balance at the end of the year. Those issues aren't issues this year and the numbers are pretty well where they need to be. Rosenberg noted that she doesn't want to be underspent at the end of the year if the money can be used to help more animals. She noted that's where the shelter can work collaboratively with the Shelter Fund to enhance the care for special-needs and severely injured animals. Part of that obstacle is training the vet clinics who to bill when and for what since the tendency is to bill care to the Shelter Fund entirely when it is involved.

Fortune asked for clarification of who pays for the rabies vaccine. Ruger replied that the State stopped providing rabies vaccine and vaccination supplies last year so Animal Control has assumed those expenses this year. He noted that's why the rabies clinic fees were raised—to cover the additional expenses of "paying our own bills." The fee increases allowed the rabies clinic to break even.

Ruger noted the answering service bill went from \$100 per month to around \$400 per month due to the fact that they were writing off the majority of the bill as charity due to who we are. However, under the current economic climate they cannot continue to do that. The result is another unfunded expense that needs to be paid from other object codes. That expense is being trimmed as much as possible using the phone tree in the new phone system during the day to minimize or eliminate overflow calls being directed to the answering service. Since daytime calls were a significant portion of the bill and each call in and out costs 55 cents, a lot of money can be saved by using the available technology in the new phone system to eliminate as many of them as possible. He noted he also canceled the pager service since the service was bad, the equipment has been in for repair and unavailable for four months, and the officers have issued cell phones that serve the same purpose as the pagers did.

Rosenberg: So basically you're where you need to be.

Ruger: Yes.

Rosenberg noted she liked the update and product Ruger provided and would like to see it quarterly if possible. Ruger agreed.

Future commission meeting dates were set for November 24th and December 29th. Ruger will reserve rooms. Rosenberg noted that the commission does not have clerical support so each attendee needs to take it upon themselves to contact the shelter for meeting locations and information as necessary as well as letting the others know if they'll be unavailable.

The question came up about temperature cutoffs to suspend meetings. Ruger state he heard somewhere that commission meetings would be suspended at -40 but there is no limit for employees: the policy is that if you don't think you can make it safely to work you can take vacation but the mayor wants services available on normal business days. Ruger noted that when temperatures hit -40 to -50 and being stranded outside for 30 minutes is "wickedly dangerous" he does use his discretion to curtail officer patrols to Priority One responses. That only happens when, in his judgment, the risks to the officers outweigh the benefits. Although the officers carry survival gear, there are still communications dead zones in the borough creating situations where someone could get hurt or worse without him being aware of it in a timely manner.

Commissioner Comments/Announcements:

Wilson noted a concern sent by a citizen to the commission via email in July titled "Cruelty Observance" and if anyone responded. Ruger stated an officer was dispatched and located the animal noting no evidence that the animal was abused. Ruger would not go into details in a public meeting due to the circumstances of the call but stated it had been investigated.

Wilson and Severa both apologized for missing the September meeting.\

Marschner noted she will be out of town January 16th through February 8th.

Rosenberg noted that the Fund will be listed in the Permanent Fund Dividend as a check-off agency for people to direct 2009 funds to online. She also noted donations to the Fund and euthanasia donations are doing well, averaging \$25 - \$50 when people donate. She also suggested placing a donation option/suggestion on the animal turn-in form. Some shelters charge to accept animals and people ask anyway, so if it's noted on the form people may choose to contribute. It could help during rough economic times.

Fortune reminded everyone how important it is to get qualified people applying for the open commission seats. She doesn't want to see the commission disbanded since it does fill a need for the shelter and community. Ruger added that, from his perspective, "You guys are gold because (you provide) direct feedback from the community, it's one of those situations where five or six heads are better than one when trying to come up with ideas and brainstorm, I've had some wonderful suggestions and support from you guys.... For instance, the ordinance change for underage animals—that would have been really long and painful to do by myself without input and support and ideas from you guys. I don't want to see this commission go away either."

A short conversation ensued about people being busy and various ideas to get qualified people interested in volunteering for the commission.

Fortune: I would like have it on record that I have heard so many different applauses for Animal Control, for the compassion that we show when animals come through, and people have brought their animals in to be euthanized, different people, people that didn't know I talked to that person and are totally unrelated, but I've had four or five people come up to me in the past three months talking about the compassion that's shown through Animal Control when they've had to bring their dogs in, in these cases, to be euthanized so I just want to applaud you all very

much.... It's just wonderful to hear. I know you're great and I want the community to know you're great.

Rosenberg: It's a very nice service we provide, no need for an appointment, and they don't have to pay anything for it—that's unusual to have such a service.

Ruger: I tell the staff that frequently at the staff meetings. The amount of mail that I get complimenting Animal Control vastly outnumbers the amount of mail I get that complains. The squeaky wheel gets the grease and sometimes it's easy for the staff to kick themselves and take it personally sometimes but I tell them 'The vast majority of the folks out there appreciate what you're doing and value what you're doing and keep up the good work'. We have a quality group of folks and I can't overstress that.

Ruger noted one other thing he thought of when speaking of community support: the new rescue contracts have been sent out and are coming back in. It's a much better contract, has been accepted very well by the rescue groups because it covers a lot of previously uncovered areas, and everyone will be under it soon. Rosenberg asked for a copy to be shared with the commission and Ruger stated he'd bring one to the next meeting or members can come by the shelter for a blank copy.

Rosenberg noted the shelter (Fortune with support from Klimaschesky and ACO Crisman) is doing the large display case at the Noel Wien Library for the month of November and invited attendees to go see it.

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:40 PM.

Submitted by Matt Ruger

November 18, 2008