

## ANIMAL CONTROL COMMISSION

### Minutes of the Regular Meeting

February 9th, 2009

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 6:32 PM.

#### MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

#### GUESTS PRESENT:

Gail Gardner  
Pat Streeter  
Sandy Klimaschesky  
Marie O'Neill  
Gidget Hagan  
Mary Bruso

#### ABSENT:

NONE

#### STAFF PRESENT:

Matt Ruger, Animal Control Manager  
Rachel Seale, ACC Secretary

ROSENBERG stated that the January 12<sup>th</sup> ACC meeting was canceled due to lack of a quorum and rescheduled to Feb 9<sup>th</sup>. There were no corrections or additions to the agenda. The November 24<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes were approved with no corrections. The December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2008 meeting minutes were not available but they will be available for the next meeting.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT:

**ROSENBERG** noted that Dr. Jeanne Olson commented at the December meeting and, in addition to her comments, she noted written comments from April that she wanted to make sure everyone saw. Rosenberg presented printed copies to the commissioners and made Dr. Olson's April 11, 2008 email part of the record as of this meeting.

[Please see attached written comment. If viewing these minutes online, the comments are available from the Clerk's office.]

There were no further public comments.

#### SHELTER REPORT:

**RUGER** noted that at the December meeting it was asked if it was a borough policy to cancel meetings due to temperatures and, while he could not find any borough policy, he did recover an old policy letter policy from the ACC. He stated the ACC can establish a cold weather policy themselves. Ruger recommended that the ACC establish a procedure if they wish to resurrect a cold weather policy, noting that the last meeting was not cancelled due to cold weather but due to a vehicle breakdown.

The job ad for the casual Admissions Clerk position closed and 6 of 36 applicants were interviewed. An offer has been made and a hire is pending.

Ruger stated the Chameleon statistical report bugs were fixed as far as he knew. The Petfinder interface is ready to go, also, and the shelter will soon be able to enter comments. Klimaschesky has been working on comments for posting and Janice is working on it also. Implementation is behind because of the holidays but progress is being made. He stated, "They keep finding things [in Chameleon] they didn't know they didn't know."

Ruger moved on to the budget and stated that several of the project requests (e.g., the cat condos, rusty door frames, and decayed walls) were removed from the capital budget by the Chief of Staff and combined into one facilities maintenance reserve request, pointing out that the action should simplify these requests and get them all taken care of as one project.

**ROSENBERG** asked for the bottom line figure for the facilities maintenance reserve request and Ruger stated that contractors will need to provide estimates. Rosenberg stated she is specifically interested in the animal care-related estimates for when the borough delves into budget work sessions and the commission begins to speak to the people in the Assembly that are "preparatory" for the big hearings they will need the itemization for animal care costs. Ruger replied that all of the requests are indirectly related to the animal care requests, stating that a contractor will need to provide estimates.

**RUGER** noted that 2008 closed out with 216 bite cases, tied with last year's lowest number of bite cases in 7 years. He provided the statistics for the following years: 2002 = 234 bites, 2003 = 270 bites, 2004 = 261 bites, 2005 = 262 bites, 2006 = 240 bites and in 2007 there were 216 bites, averaging 243 of bites a year. 34 of the 216 bite 2008 cases were unconfirmed (non-bites). Ruger believes the television spots the shelter does as well as other educational forums such as the table/booth at the fair are helping lower the bite numbers. He also stated that the lower numbers may also be a result of the officers being out and visible.

**RUGER** noted that the operating budget was submitted to David Gibbs last week and the only changes are minor increases in television advertising so AC can buy spots on more channels. The answering service budget increased to reflect actual costs and hasn't been adjusted for nearly 10 years. Costs have been reduced considerably using the new phone tree but the budget is still less than half of actual cost. Some line items that were no longer needed were also removed so the budget was only increased a moderate \$12,400.

**RUGER** noted that he finished the policy manual draft last month and HR is currently reviewing it. He will propose a review of the policy manual draft as an agenda item for the ACC but it has to get through HR first. Finally, he told the ACC there was a very good article in the News-Miner on January 27<sup>th</sup> with good information about the shelter and the foster program.

**ROSENBERG** suggested that the article could be read online by those who hadn't seen it.

**RUGER** noted he received two calls for interviews from the News-Miner, KIAK-FM called for an interview of Ruger and Rosenberg by Katherine Harris, aired last weekend, focused on funding and the Shelter Fund. He will be asked back in 6 or 7 weeks to talk about Animal Control's operations. He was also interviewed on KJNP Thursday night on *Closing Comments*. The interview was initiated after Dick Olson read the newspaper article. Ruger noted the interview was approximately 35 minutes long and went very well.

**ROSENBERG** noted the interview was aired on television although she hoped it would be run on the radio as well.

**RUGER** noted that a person called in and asked if it were illegal for cats to eat birds. (Laughter from attendees) He stated that he told her that while there were no ordinances forbidding cats from eating birds, the ordinance does require cats to be restrained so, in that respect, they should not be eating birds. He also answered questions about types of animals available at the shelter and adoption fees. He reiterated that it was a good interview that went twice as long as scheduled and he was invited back. He also noted that Dick Olson was a good interviewer and didn't use any notes. Ruger concluded that he had not done an interview about the shelter recently and then had several all at once, resulting in some very good press last week.

**RUGER** noted there is still no word on the hiring of a new Emergency Operations Manager so he will continue to work directly for Bob Shefchik though it seems they are close to hiring someone.

**ROSENBERG** asked if the commissioners had questions regarding Ruger's shelter report.

**ROSENBERG** asked if 13.4% is the bottom line for 2008 discretionary euthanasia

**RUGER** confirmed it was 13.49% and "discretionary" denotes all euthanasias excluding those that are owner-requested, and noted that this is the fourth year of a steady decrease in discretionary euthanasia. The owner-requested euthanasia rate was 14.63%. He noted that there is little the shelter can do to impact owner-requested euthanasia since the law requires compliance with the owners' wishes even in the case of healthy animals.

**WILSON** noted that euthanasia due to lack of space has really declined from 2005 statistics.

**RUGER** confirmed her observation, crediting the drop, in large part, to an active foster program.

It was noted that the 13.49% represented a nearly 4% drop from last year.

**ROSENBERG** noted that the Shelter Fund has treated at least 30-40 animals that would have been euthanized 5 years ago due to their health but Shelter Fund donors have enabled the Fund to provide money to treat health issues that used to be death sentences.

**RUGER** mentioned that Red, a Doberman Pinscher recovering from heartworms, is currently getting care due to the Shelter Fund.

**ROSENBERG** noted Red and many other animals have benefitted, mentioning the diabetic Schnauzer and the Springer with Addison's Disease and noting the costs to care for all of those animals adds up in a year.

**FORTUNE** said she wishes they could put these positive incidents in the paper so the community knows what they are doing.

**RUGER** noted that stories have been done in the past though there have not been any recently.

**ROSENBERG** noted that the biggest problem is animals at-large causing bites, breeding, and officer calls. Rosenberg credits the "recalcitrant public" for causing the at-large problem and that this demographic does not necessarily read newspaper editorials but tends to pay more attention to the television and radio spots.

**FORTUNE** noted she sees Animal Controls public service announcements often and they are “great.”

**RUGER** noted that the television stations do a good job of spreading the ads out during prime time and people are bound to see the ads if they watch Fox or CBS. Ruger mentioned he also wants to get ads on Channel 11.

**FORTUNE** asked if the number of foster homes has increased. It has and the officers are trying to catch up on a backlog of home visits for approval. There are now an estimated 60+ approved fosters.

**ROSENBERG** mentioned that fostered animals are now posted on Petfinder.

**FORTUNE** said she will add foster animals to her weekly list posted at Cold Spot.

**ROSENBERG** asked if there were any more questions or comments for Matt.

**FORTUNE** asked if this was an appropriate time to address the noise issue at the shelter. She asked if the music that is played at the shelter on the weekend can be played at a balanced level as she believes it may traumatize the animals, especially the Doberman (Red) who is supposed to remain calm.

**RUGER** said he is not there on the weekends and was not aware the music volume was excessive. He stated there have been concerns about noise levels in the past but he does not know if the music is worse than the barking. As far as music volume of music is concerned, Ruger has not heard it but recognizes there is no need for excessively loud music. He wants the staff to be able to listen to music because the job is very labor-intensive and he believes the atmosphere should be enjoyable for staff; however, he agrees that the music does not need to be excessively loud. On weekday mornings they have music on before opening but it has not been excessively loud and the animals don't seem more stressed about the loud music than they are when it is loud because of barking dogs. However, he stated he will ask staff to use “common sense” at the staff meetings. He also told Fortune that if the music bothers her when she's volunteering she can feel free to ask them to turn it down.

There were no other questions for Ruger.

OLD BUSINESS:

There is no old business.

NEW BUSINESS

**ROSENBERG** noted the elections for 2009 Chair and Vice-Chair were overdue due to cancelation of the January meeting, then turned the nomination process for Chair over to Severa.

**HAGAN** asked if the election has to be at this meeting because there will be four new commissioners starting their terms next month.

**ROSENBERG** stated they must have the elections at this meeting because they should have been held in January and were already overdue. New members come all the time but elections are held in January of every year.

**HAGAN** stated she did not realize that this was in the by-laws.

**ROSENBERG** and Ruger affirmed that it is.

**SEVERA** called for nominations. Fortune nominated Rosenberg and was seconded by Marschner. Rosenberg accepted the nomination but asked for other volunteers but there were none. A vote by secret ballot was conducted, Ruger counted the votes and Rosenberg was reelected unanimously.

**ROSENBERG** asked for nominations for Vice-Chair. Fortune nominated Severa, Wilson and Marschner seconded the nomination, and Rosenberg called the vote. Ruger counted the ballots: four for Severa and one said "Ronnie, Ha Ha". Rosenberg declared the ballot invalid (among chuckles from the other commissioners) and declared Severa the Vice-Chair by unanimous vote.

**ROSENBERG** moved on to the Animal Control budget for the upcoming fiscal year, mentioning they are in the budget cycle and the capital budget has been submitted. She noted the request for a replacement truck.

**RUGER** stated that one of the F-150s is due for replacement on its 7-year cycle and he has requested that it be replaced with a Super Duty to safely pull the horse trailer.

**ROSENBERG**, noting the budget had been discussed earlier, asks if there is anything unusual in the budget that calls for further discussion.

**RUGER** stated that he gave the ACC a copy of the current budget as of the end of December and it's on track. He stated that the new budget is a maintenance budget and not appreciably different. He added that the security system needs to be replaced so he has added that to the budget. Both indoor and outdoor cameras would be added. He noted that there have been "hijinks" around the shelter including the slashing of a tire on his personal truck a couple of weeks ago. He stated that this incident occurred on a Friday and Streeter noticed the tire had been cut sometime between 5:00 and 8:30 PM. Ruger mentions he also got a letter in the mail and stated that someone had made it clear that they do not like him.

**SEVERA** asked if Ruger filed a police report.

**RUGER** replied that he had and noted that this is the kind of thing that goes with the territory; people get upset when they have their animals running loose then when they get picked up they blame Animal Control for it. Ruger noted again that this is to be expected with his position but that it does get expensive when they begin slashing tires.

**SEVERA** stated that it is a "fine line" whether this kind of incident "goes with the territory."

**RUGER** agreed with Severa, stating that the incident emphasized the weakness they already knew about the security system and that has requested an upgrade of the system with more cameras and a digital recorder. The request did not increase his requested budget as it is already in the projected budget for a project that wasn't completed last year.

**ROSENBERG**, returning to the budget, mentioned postage costs.

**RUGER** agreed that the postage and tipping fees increased and also mentioned the increased cost of the answering service. He stated that the answering service cost has not gone up in 9 years. The service has been charging \$100 a month and writing off \$400 as charitable giving but with the economy in its current state they cannot continue that practice. The phone tree was brought into use to try to split the difference.

There were no other questions or comments on the budget.

**ROSENBERG** reopened public comment as three members of the public (O'Neil, Brusio and Hagan) arrived after the first Public Comment closed. One member indicated she wanted to comment.

**BRUSIO** (Mary Brusio, 650 Merry Meadow Lane, Chena Hot Springs Road) asks for the protocol when an AC officer responds to a call-out. She stated she had an aggressive pit bull in her yard and was told by the dispatcher that took her call that the budget prevented AC officers from coming out. She mentioned that she has a daycare and horses at her residence and the pit bull was in her horse corral all day until its owner returned home.

**RUGER** asked what day this occurred.

**BRUSIO** stated that it occurred in the fall before the snow fell.

**RUGER** clarified that he was asking what day of the week it occurred.

**BRUSIO** responded that the incident occurred on a Tuesday.

**RUGER** asked Rosenberg if she wanted him to respond to that. She did. He stated that it is not the budget but the workload that may affect how an AC officer responds to a call. He said Priority 1 calls are answered first and animals at large are not their highest priority calls, explaining that a Priority 1 call is when an animal is dead, dying, or has bitten someone and officers have to respond to those calls first. He repeated that officer availability, not the budget, determines response times. After Priority 1 calls are complete all other calls are run in the order they come in. He said someone should have responded at some point to her call even if it was not the day of the call.

**BRUSIO** stated there was never a response.

**ROSENBERG** asked if the dog is still a problem.

**BRUSIO** replied that the dog has not been a problem since the day of the incident because she told the owner she would shoot it. She mentioned this has happened before with other stray dogs chasing her horses and an officer did come out and parked at the end of the driveway but did not approach the house/corral then called her and told her there were no dogs. She stated that her own dog was sitting in her yard and the officer did not even see this dog and concluded it was because the officer was not looking for a dog on her property.

**RUGER** stated that AC officers will not come out on private property unless invited by the property owners or if the officers are in pursuit of an animal at large. He asked for the spelling of Brusio's name so he could follow up on the incident that occurred last fall.

**ROSENBERG** asked if Ruger will be able to check by complainant's name to track down what happened.

**RUGER** stated that the dispatcher should not have stated that AC would not respond to a call and Ruger, himself, has never heard her say that AC will not respond to a call. He said she will say AC cannot respond right away but they will respond at some point. He asserted that every call gets "closed" and he will follow up on this incident. Ruger expresses that it seems like it happened before AC officers started following up on every call and getting back to complainants and letting them know the results of their complaint, but he will look the incident up. Ruger confirms with Brusio that this occurred last fall.

**WILSON** suggested that making it procedure to explain to complainants that they need to give the AC officer permission to enter their private property when they call AC is an idea to look into.

**FORTUNE** agreed.

**RUGER** stated that most of the time people do not want officers on their property. He noted that when the dispatcher asks whether complainants want personal contact or telephone contact when AC follows up, most people opt for telephone contact because they don't want AC seen talking to them.

**ROSENBERG** advised Brusio that if an incident like this occurs again and the response is unsatisfactory, Brusio should immediately ask to speak with the manager so that corrections can be made immediately and to also make sure she gets help.

**RUGER** concurred and stated that budget does affect staffing and AC officer response times but it has never been their policy to not go on calls due to budget. He repeated that all calls are supposed to be answered and closed.

There was no further public comment.

#### COMMISSIONER COMMENTS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

**FORTUNE** commented on corrections being limited to admin/staff answering the phone; officers should be in line if necessary if the officer doesn't respond properly.

**RUGER** stated that EVERYONE is open to correction, including himself.

**SEVERA** referring to the open item from the last meeting about the temperature, expressed the opinion that this should be something the ACC considers at the next meeting.

**ROSENBERG** noted they will put that on agenda for new business and asked the other commissioners to put some thought into what kind of policy they want.

**WILSON** asked that they add discussion of the public meeting law and communication with the public to the agenda so everyone is "on the same page." Specifically, how commissioners should respond to phone calls and inquiries, as she has been afraid to respond to emails.

**ROSENBERG** clarified that commissioners are free to talk to the public and send emails and vice versa—people will call—but what cannot be done is the commissioners cannot talk amongst themselves about commission business, and this is without exception. She stated that commissioners can interface with a member of the public but do not “cc” fellow commissioners. She added that public members can send emails to all members of the commission and commissioners can respond to the public but cannot utilize “reply to all” or “cc” commissioners as that is violating the state law. She noted this rule also applies if there is a committee formed within the ACC; there must be adequate public notice when ACC business is discussed among commissioners.

**WILSON** noted that her question was answered.

**MARSCHNER** asked if they, as commissioners, have to inform the ACC when they do respond to a member of the public.

**ROSENBERG** stated commissioners can talk to the public, Ruger or other AC staff but not other commission members. Commissioners also cannot speak for the borough or the ACC unless the ACC has passed a resolution; otherwise, they are speaking for themselves. She noted that audio from the meetings is posted on the borough website and the minutes have always been available through the Clerk’s office.

**RUGER** noted that the minutes are also posted on the borough website also once they are approved.

**SEVERA** suggested they set a date for the next two meetings and also made a recommendation that the April meeting occur in the North Pole. The previous attempt was unsuccessful due to a communication error via email and she will find a meeting location in North Pole.

**ROSENBERG** agreed, providing a place is found. She noted that the commission must have six meetings per year and they’ve missed two scheduled meetings due to lack of quorum. She concluded that the meetings in March and April will bring the total to six.

March 9<sup>th</sup> and April 13<sup>th</sup> were chosen for the next two meetings and Severa will find a location in North Pole for the April meeting to allow NP residents to more easily attend.

A motion was made and seconded to close the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 7:37 PM.

Submitted by Rachel Seale on behalf of Matt Ruger

Note: The written comments dated April, 11, 2008 referred to in these minutes are available in hard copy at the FNSB Clerk’s office.