



City of Bowie

2614 Kenhill Drive
Bowie, Maryland 20715

MEMORANDUM

TO: City Council

FROM : David J. Deutsch, City Manager

SUBJECT: Staff Comments regarding Animal Shelter Task Force Report

DATE: February 25, 2010

In 2008 a group of residents and individuals from nearby communities came together to form a nonprofit organization, Bowie CLAW (Citizens for Local Animal Welfare), which has advocated for a City-based animal shelter and worked to educate the community in animal welfare related issues. CLAW has also provided support to individuals who needed financial and/or nutrition assistance in caring for their pets. CLAW has been very successful in advocating for pets in our community and we applaud their efforts.

As a direct result of CLAW advocacy, the City Council established the Animal Shelter Task Force in July 2009. The primary objective of the Task Force was to investigate the need for the City to operate a short-term animal holding facility within the City limits. It was felt by some that City Animal Control Officers were spending a large percentage of their time making trips to the County shelter. It was also felt that many animals were not being returned to their owners as a result of the lengthy trip required to retrieve the animal, coupled with the fact that animals are at times euthanized at the County shelter.

The Task Force completed this objective and submitted a report to Council on January 22, 2010. The Task Force recommended, by a 4 to 3 vote, that the City establish a 1,500 square foot short-term animal holding facility that would shelter cats and dogs for up to five (5) business days before they would be taken to the County Animal Services Facility. The Task Force acknowledges that in addition to construction and operating costs, one or two additional staff positions would be required to staff the facility. Personnel costs alone could reach \$80-100,000 per year. There would be other operational costs as well.

In their FINDINGS, the Task Force asserts that the establishment of a short-term holding shelter would:

- 1) Provide residents an efficient and compassionate means to reunite with their lost companion animals and eliminate incidents of pets being euthanized before their owners could claim them.

Staff Comment

During the past year, City staff has transported 129 cats and dogs to the County Animal Shelter. We are aware of no instances in that time when a pet was euthanized which resulted in the inability of the cat or dog to be reunited with an owner who desired that return. During 2009, on 389 occasions a City Animal Control Officer was dispatched in response to calls about an animal (almost exclusively dogs) running at large. Of those, 88% of the dogs that were captured were returned to their owners in the field. Only 13 dogs were euthanized for health or other reasons. The remainder were either placed for adoption or rescued by others.

The City Animal Control Officers do not catch cats. Virtually all of the 62 cats, the majority of them feral, which were taken to the shelter, were as a result of a resident requesting a trap for a nuisance situation. The adoption/redemption rate for cats sadly is much lower than dogs and many are euthanized for health or other reasons.

- 2) Decrease the number of trips made to the County Shelter.

Staff Comment

During 2009, City Animal Control Officers transported 138 animals, including wildlife, to the County Shelter. On many occasions, more than one animal was transported during the same trip. The average number of trips per week was 2 - 2.5. The total number of trips may not be significantly decreased by the establishment of a Bowie-based shelter as some were to transport injured or deceased animals (deer, possum, etc.) and would occur even if pets remained in the City.

- 3) Enable residents without transportation (Senior Citizens and handicapped individuals for example) to more easily be reunited with their pets.

Staff Comment

Having a local shelter would certainly make it easier for a senior or handicapped individual to pick up a pet, however please note that no member of the Animal Control staff can ever remember a request for transportation to the Shelter being made. Should that occur, the City would assist that resident in securing transportation.

- 4) Enhance the City's reputation as a progressive leader in providing humane and compassionate treatment of animals.

Staff Comment

City Animal Control Officers are extremely well trained. Both are graduates of the National Animal Control Association (NACA) certification program Animal Cruelty Level 1 and Animal Cruelty Level 2 classes and pride themselves in their knowledge of animal issues and service to the community. The City's Animal Control division is also well respected in the Statewide professional organization Professional Animal Workers Society (PAWS).

- 5) Provide other services such as microchipping, rabies immunization, licensing, spay/neuter clinics, etc.

The City has, for many years worked cooperatively with the County Health Department to provide a low cost local rabies clinic. We sell licenses at City Hall and are working with a local veterinarian to provide a local, low cost microchipping opportunity and hopefully later a spay/neuter option.

Within the past nine months, Prince George's County has opened a new state-of-the-art Animal Shelter on Brown Station Road in Upper Marlboro. The County has plans to offer many of the requested services such as microchipping and spay/neuter at this facility in the coming months.

When the new City Hall building is completed in February 2011, it will include specially designed and outfitted rooms which will allow the City Animal Control Officer to keep "recovered" pets on site until the close of business each day. This will provide a more comfortable setting for the animal while he/she waits to be retrieved. It will also allow for the resident pet owner to get home from work, realize their pet may have escaped and contact the City to be reunited without the drive to the County Shelter. This may reduce the number of trips to the Shelter and will certainly allow those trips, when needed, to occur during the late evening hours when our Animal Control Officers are less busy.

It would be staff's position that beyond the opening of the already planned holding room at the new City Hall, the City not expand into the Animal Shelter business at this time, and that Council defers any future expenditure of capital funds until the new City Hall holding area has been in use for at least one year. During that time, staff will continue outreach efforts to provide a Bowie-based opportunity for reduced fee spay/neuter and microchipping and continue to provide Bowie-based venues for licensing and rabies vaccinations.

Staff would again like to commend the Task Force for their ongoing commitment in researching the issues related to the establishment of a short-term holding facility. We encourage the Committee and other members of the community, especially those in the CLAW organization, to continue their excellent volunteer efforts in providing funding for residents who need assistance with pet food or pet medical care; in providing education related to animal issues through the local media and their own website/newsletter, and by

providing transportation to the County (or soon to be opened City) facility for pet owners who have been separated from their pets and are unable to transport themselves.

DJD/SH