

Task Force on Humane Treatment of animals in Municipal and Regional shelters

Attendance:

Chair Michael Freda, Mark Bailey, Paula Poplawski, Sergeant Paula Keller, Dr. Gayle Block, Laura Burban, Raymond Connors, Cynthia Theran

Calling the Meeting to Order:

Chairman Freda convened the meeting at 2:04 pm

Public Comment relative to the Agenda:

There was none.

Review of the objectives task-force action plan:

Chairman Freda asked that the members read the seven objectives outlined in the action plan. These were

1. Recommendations for the establishment of standards for the humane treatment of animals in such shelters.
2. Existing education and training standards for animal control officers on current license laws.
3. Rules and regulations regarding and penalties for abuse
4. The development of a system to track persons who have been convicted of animal abuse in order to prevent persons from acquiring animals in other municipalities or states.
5. The establishment of standards for such shelters to use when evaluating potential adopters for such animals.
6. The establishment of rules and responsibilities for volunteer groups that work with such shelters and animal control officers
7. The creation of a framework to coordinate the efforts of local humane organizations with volunteer groups, foster groups and municipal and regional animal shelters.

Paula Poplawski asked whether one of these objectives was removed since the last meeting. It was clarified that the objective of, creating a model for mandatory spay and neuter was already complete and no longer needed to be included on the list.

Chairman Freda asked what the best way to begin work on these objectives would be, either by assigning specific objectives to individual task-force members or creating sub-committees to work on these issues.

Dr. Gayle Block voiced her support for the creation of sub-committees.

Chairman Freda stated that the task-force was still in its planning stage.

Mark Bailey asked for clarification as to whether it was the duty of the task-force to make just legislative recommendations or other types of policy recommendations outside the purview of the legislative process. Mark stated that it was his personal opinion that he felt the task-forces duty should extend to other types of recommendations.

Chairman Freda continued by stating that the duty of the task-force was to explore and prioritize the seven objectives presented by the task-force and make recommendations to the general assembly.

Dr. Gayle Block stated that she believed the education and training of animal control officers was the most important objective to be followed by the creation of an animal abuse registry.

Sgt. Keller stated that she agreed that objective 2, the education and training of animal control officers, was the most important objective on the list.

Paula Poplawski stated that it should go without saying that the terms in objective 2“education and training” would include the proper care and treatment of shelter animals. She also stated that objective 4 was also essential and that objective 1 the establishment of standards would also be something she would be willing to work on.

Raymond Connors stated that the animal abuse registry was something the task-force had already created a recommendation for, but that the proposal had failed to become a piece of legislation. He suggested that since the recommendation was still in existence, the task-force should remove that as an objective. He also stated that there are already minimum training standards for animal control officers in statute. Raymond said what is lacking is the establishment of standards for the certification of animal control officers and that that should be the objective of the task-force.

Sgt. Keller noted that objective 3 should be changed to reflect the terminology laws and statutes rather than rules and regulations.

Chairman Freda stated that the laws regarding what constitutes animal abuse may be tricky and pointed to anecdote from his experience as mayor. He suggested the task-force focus on refining the existing statutes rather than rewriting them completely.

Cynthia Theran suggested having two sub-committees that were responsible for roughly half of the objectives. She suggested having one sub-committee take on objectives 1, 2, and 6.

Laura Burban stated that she was particularly interested in tightening up the definitions of the animal abuse laws. She was also interested in having animal control officers trained in animal behavior.

Mark Bailey supported the idea of creating two sub-committees so the task-force could come up with complete and comprehensive recommendations for the time constraints of the task-force. Mark Bailey suggested also looking into a euthanasia oversight committee for shelters, so animals were not euthanized due to the bias of the overseeing animal control officer.

Mike Freda suggested reintroducing the original recommendation for objective 4 and not having the task-force work towards that objective. He asked the task-force if they agreed with that.

There was a consensus to reintroduce the original recommendation for objective 4.

Laura Burban stated that objective 1-3 should indeed be the focus.

Mark Bailey suggested creating separate sub-committees for objective 1, 2, and 3.

Sgt. Keller said she thought a sub-committee to work on 1, 2, and 3 made the most sense.

Subcommittee Assignments:

Chairman Freda with that moved onto sub-committee assignments and stated that one sub-committee for objectives 1, 2, and 3 would be formed and he asked what another different sub-committee should be formed around.

Laura Burban stated that it should probably be objectives 5, 6, and 7.

Chairman Freda concurred with that and then moved onto assignment of members to the task-force sub-committee.

Mark Bailey asked that the euthanasia oversight committee idea be added to one of the sub-committees as an objective.

Raymond Connor's asked that the Chairman decide who is in each subcommittee.

Laura Burban, Cynthia Theran, and Paula Poplawski were volunteered to serve on the subcommittee handling objectives 5, 6, and 7.

Paula stated that since the other committee was so large why they don't leave the business of the subcommittee to the regular task-force meetings.

Dr. Gayle Block asked that those meetings go ahead.

It was decided that both sub-committees would continue to meetings outside of the regularly scheduled task-force meetings.

Open Forum:

Chairman Freda then opened it up to an open forum discussion.

Dr. Gayle Block began by bringing up comments by the head of the animal population control advisory board Frank Bravado who spoke about the mandatory spay and neuter proposal. She relayed to the task-force that although she supported the spaying and neutering of adopted animals, they were both opposed to the mandatory spaying and neutering of animals adopted from shelters.

She stated that 71% of all adopted animals are spayed or neutered, and although that still leaves a considerable number of animals, she felt that this was under-reported for many reasons, including adopters not submitting voucher forms.

She also believed it was important for a new adopter to begin forming a relationship with a veterinarian as soon as possible once they adopted an animal. She stated that this should start with bringing in their pet to be spayed or neutered.

Mark Bailey asked if the advisory board had read the language the task-force had proposed.

Dr. Gayle Block stated that they had not and were simply reacting to the idea of mandatory spay and neutering.

Mark Bailey stated that the language the task-force presented as a recommendation to the legislature made spaying and neutering a condition of adoption and that based on the policy of the shelter facility, it was possible for the adopter to choose where to have the adopted animal spayed or neutered.

Laura Burban argued the opposite point that she did not believe mandatory spay in neuter in a shelter was a bad idea. She explained that many shelters direct new adopters to local veterinarians to develop that relationship.

Dr. Gayle Block brought up the fact that there is an existing animal adoption waiver program. That provides vouchers for part of the costs of neutering or spaying adopted animals. If a mandatory spay and neutering law was enacted, that program, and the veterinarians that participate in it would be abandoned.

Laura Burban stated that just because a veterinarian receives a voucher from a client that does not mean that the client is getting a better deal, because the veterinarian may be adjusting the cost of the procedure to account for the voucher.

Dr. Gayle Block agreed that some veterinarians involved in the program did charge fees in addition to the voucher. She did state that despite this she did feel that it was important that a new adopter develop a relationship with a veterinarian who usually begins with spaying and neutering the new pet.

Laura Burban made an additional point about mandatory vaccinations for shelter adopted animals.

Mark Bailey stated that New Haven shelters had had a program in place where they direct adopters to a list of veterinarians to have their newly adopted animal spayed or neutered.

Dr. Gayle Block stated her disagreement with that type of program.

Mark Bailey stated that her concerns might be valid but that there were never any complaints regarding the program from other veterinarians in the area.

Raymond Connors asked Laura Burban if mandatory spay/neuter and vaccination is to be implemented into law how does that address the 20,000 animals that get imported into the state every year.

Laura stated that she knew that the import of animals from other states is an issue and that the addressing concerns with CT's animals should take priority over out of state animals.

Laura moved onto the idea of an oversight committee. She stated that shelters need more resources to guide them to be successful, she noted that shelters are often underfunded, understaffed, and the staff they do have are under-trained. She stated that it would be beneficial to provide municipal shelters another resource to rely on for assistance.

Raymond Connors mentioned a non-profit group does offer free animal behavior/evaluation classes, so that is one resource that shelters and animal control officers have.

Cynthia Theran agreed that a service like that would be great but that it should be mandatory for animal control officers and shelter staffers to have.

Sgt. Keller agreed that it should not just be on the animal control officer to decide on whether an animal is adoptable or not but disagreed with the premise of an oversight committee. She felt that a group of people who do not have direct contact with an animal should not have the final say on whether an animal gets euthanized as they are not observing the animal or working as closely with it as an animal control officer.

Laura Burban stated that she would need to determine how the committee gets comprised carefully.

Dr. Gayle Block stated that they should provide animal control officers the proper training and rely on them to make an educated and appropriate decision about the animals in their care.

Laura Burban reiterated the point of accountability in this process. She stated that if not a committee then there should be some checks and balances to the process.

Dr. Gayle Block stated that a trained animal control officer and veterinarian should have the combined expertise to determine whether an animal should or shouldn't be put down.

Mark Bailey and Laura Burban stated that they felt that left too much room for subjectivity in the decision to euthanize an animal.

Mark further explained that most animal control officers would prefer to defer to a second opinion in the case of euthanasia and would appreciate an objective opinion.

Dr. Gayle Block stated that she did not disagree with the oversight committee; she simply disagreed with the idea of mandating it for towns.

Sgt. Keller stated that her city does not have an oversight committee and that if there is a problem animal, then it is usually apparent. She pointed out that if there is too much emphasis put on euthanasia, problem animals won't be euthanized and people could get hurt as a result.

Laura Burban stated that she agreed that safety is the priority, but that animals do get deemed aggressive when they are just displaying behavior that demonstrates extreme kennel stress. She reiterated the need to provide animal control officers more resources.

Sgt. Keller felt the real issue was training rather than lack of consultation.

Chairman Freda moved onto public comment

Public Comment:

Melanie Attwater Young former Liaison to the Department of Agriculture. She asked whether minutes for the meeting would be available, how the task-force was commissioned, and how the task-force discerned the objectives of the task-force if there was no bill.

Chairman Freda stated that the task-force was recommissioned by the Senate President Pro Tempores from the previously passed P.A. 14-205 and that this task-force was simply a continuation of the work of that task-force so the objectives and operation of the task-force would be the same and that meeting minutes for the task-force would be made available online.

Melanie stated that she did not object to the task-forces existence unless its formation wasn't legal.

Chairman Freda explained that the recommendations of the committee would only be made to the Senate since this was a Senate task-force.

Sgt. Pimer, Animal control officer of West Haven, Stated that the training mentioned by Ray Connors and Sgt. Keller earlier took care of most of the animal control officer training issues the task-force reviewed. He noted the need for clarification in the animal abuse statutes, which the task-force mentioned and that objective 4. (The creation of an animal abuse registry) was useless until there were more convictions for animal abuse cases. He also said that there should be another objective added which is animal control officer safety and that the idea of an oversight committee would be burdensome to an animal control officer and a municipal shelter.

Sgt. Keller brought up that she has added police officer safety training to the animal control officer training that she taught.

Chairman Freda suggested that if an animal control officer lacked necessary equipment, they should put together a capital improvement plan to bring before their town administration.

Elise McConnell, animal control officer of Manchester and President of Municipal Animal Control Officer Association, stated that she did not know of any animal control officers or municipal shelters in the state that had euthanized an animal due to lack of space. She pointed out that if an animal was being euthanized then that animal was likely a public safety concern. She critiqued the idea of implementing oversight councils, since there were already evaluation processes in place for municipal animal control officers and because there was no evidence to suggest inappropriate euthanizations were occurring in Connecticut shelters. She also stated that there was a lack of standards and training for the animal control profession that made the profession difficult and unsafe.

Cynthia Theran stated that if there were legitimate safety concerns in the animal control officer profession, then those concerns should be brought up to a state level department or legislative committee as that issue was outside the cognizance of the task-force.

Mark Bailey and Laura Burban clarified that the idea the task-force was discussing was not supposed to be an oversight committee for the animal control officer, but rather a group of people that would be there to assist an animal control officer in deciding whether or not to euthanize an animal.

Tina Binheimer, animal control officer of Tolland, Willington, and Ashford. Asked the task-force what constituted humane treatment since many of the animals in the shelter could stay for years.

Sgt. Keller stated her agreement with the point. She stated that perhaps the focus of the committee should be the cause of why these animals end up in shelters in the first place.

Adjournment:

Chairman Freda thanked everyone who came to the meeting to discuss these issues and stated the next meeting was scheduled for October 6th.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:46 p.m.