



TULSA ANIMAL WELFARE COMMISSION

Tulsa Animal Welfare Commission

Regular Meeting | September 16th | 6:00 pm
One Technology Center 175 East 2nd Street Tulsa OK 74103
10th Floor North Conference Room

Commissioners Present:

Susan Savage
Christine Kunzweiler
Cordell Dement
Robin Ballenger
Teresa Meinders Burkett

Others: Dwain Midget, Jean Letcher, Jack Blair, Christina da Silva

MEETING MINUTES

Commissioner Chair Savage called the meeting to order at 6:06pm and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Burkett motioned for the meeting minutes to be approved, Commissioner Ballenger seconded. Motion passed.

Feedback Survey Report

Commissioner Chair Savage asked Christina da Silva to discuss the Tulsa Animal Ordinance Feedback Survey. da Silva shared explained the survey would be open until Saturday August 31st and was accessible online via the website.

Commissioner Chair Savage requested that the final report identify important topics and best practices for the Commission to consider. da Silva responded that the report can be formatted so that it could include highlights and the survey items with the most responses could be identified. Commissioner Ballenger asked if the report could also identify where there are areas of consensus and where there are areas of disagreement. Commissioner Burkett asked how best practices were considered when drafting the changes. Letcher explained that the draft changes were based on researching best practices from other cities that had been conducted with previous working groups and partners.

Determining Legal Questions and Discovery Areas from Commissioners

Commissioner Chair Savage noted that one of the questions she had was the criteria for how state law regulates spay and neuter and if the local ordinances and policies are compatible. Commissioner Chair Savage also stated that some of the definitions for terms, such as animal rescue groups, needed more clarity and details.

da Silva stated that she would collect questions from Commissioners to submit to legal department to respond to.

Department Updates

Dwain Midget and Jean Letcher shared updates on positions that have been filled, including Animal Control Officers and the Diversion Helpline Coordinator to help promote adoptions. Some of the TAW positions are still open. Letcher explained that the Diversion Helpline Coordinator would help families who are coming into the shelter to surrender their animal and would work with the family to see if there are resources that could help the family keep the animal. The Helpline would be available to answer questions and provide resources for families who have pets in their homes. The Diversion Coordinator would also collaborate with partner agencies to provide referral.

Ballenger asked if TAW has enough Animal Control Officers. Letcher answered that once all 12 positions are filled, she believed that there would staff to patrol 10 hours a day.

Dement asked if there were enough partners could be engaged fulfill needed capacity to address challenges and how are we currently engaging with these external organizations. Letcher explained that currently external organizations do not have the authority to cite or to legally confiscate an animal. Midget shared that this question could be brought to legal department to address and see if state law offers any options.

Letcher shared that they are working to organize the “Clear the Shelter” event, where adoptions would be \$10. She also shared that they will begin a process called “Open Adoption”, where pets would be eligible for adoption even during their stray hold period. Anyone adopting an animal through this process would be aware that the original owner still has the right to claim the animal within the 3 day stray hold period. This process came as a recommendation from shelter specialists of the University of Madison Wisconsin. One of the main goals of this program is to reduce the number of days that an animal remains at the shelter. Letcher explained that only about 10-12% of animals that come into the shelter are returned to their original owner. She further explained that they will be working to inform the public that if they have lost their animal, they should contact the shelter as soon as possible. With the shelter being open seven days a week now, that should be increased access for the public to access the shelter.

Midget also shared that two million dollars was added to the Improve Our Tulsa proposal which would need to be approved by voters in November.

Commissioner Chair Savage opened the meeting for open comment.

Kay Backues introduced herself as a veterinarian and shared that she had previously worked at the Tulsa Animal Shelter. She shared that she has a passion for canine sports. She was concerned about the exemption permits. She was concerned that every year she would have to pay \$100 and every year she would have to confirm that her animals were actively participating in canine sports every year. She explained that many animals may retire or take time off from participating from sports. She was also concerned that Section 117 allows a WIN officer to enter the property at any time. She shared that she wants to be a law-abiding citizen but is concerned that the process is difficult to obtain the permits and the fees make it more expensive. She also shared that she recommends maintaining the fees at the same rate of \$25 and combining the exemption permits for individuals who would like to participate in canine sports and also have more than 5 animals.

Burkett explained that the draft changes in Section 116 still maintain that an Animal Control Officer would need to have permission or a warrant to enter a property or an animal would need to be in danger. Backues was concerned that there was a discrepancy in the language in Section 117.

Backues further shared that she had other comments about Chapter 10 -Community Cats. She explained that she works with the Zoo and with several national several wildlife and public health organizations. She was concerned that trap neuter release does not effectively reduce the number of colonies of feral cats. She also shared public health concerns, including increasing the risk of parasites or rabies.

Ballenger asked if she had a recommendation for addressing the feral cat population. Backues responded that the cat population should be trapped and removed from the environment, either adopted or euthanized.

Anna Vaughn shared that she is an Irish Setter breeder and has had 5 litters since 1989. She currently has a hobbyist license and uses that to also participate in hunting and showing her dogs. She also shared that she has also rescued about 25 Irish Setters since the 1980s. She expressed that she was confused why the one hobbyist permit was going to be split up into three different permits. She said that the process to obtain a permit is cumbersome and burdensome and that she wants to try do the right thing, but the process makes it very difficult.

Kristen Henry shared that she had a 13 page letter that she would be sending to the commissioners. She wanted to address some of the points in the letter. She was concerned about dogs that are confiscated and brought to the shelter. These dogs are evidence for cruelty cases and are held at the shelter during the bonding process. Henry shared that there could be legal options for the TAW shelter to pursue for these dogs to not have to stay at the shelter, but the TAW shelter has not pursued them with Tulsa County. Henry also asked about the Harvard Bloomberg Project and wondered if there would be a report. da Silva explained that City staff is working with Harvard Bloomberg staff to complete a final summary with next steps that would be published. Commissioners Burkett, Ballinger, and Kunzweiler explained that they listened to the final presentation and it was focused more on helping the City create new ways to engage residents in solving city-wide challenges.

Stephany Garra expressed concern about penalties not reflecting the crime. Letcher shared that the penalties are a range and anytime a person is booked to court, a judge will set the fine. She also shared that there are few breeds that experience health problems if they are spayed or neutered before 18 months. She also expressed concern Section 117E and enforcement rules. Garra also expressed that the survey was long and cumbersome.

Patty Mandrell shared that the shelter has been collecting and euthanizing cats since 1941 but it has not reduced the number of feral cats. She shared that using trap-neuter-return methods coupled with community education will help reduce the numbers of cats. She also shared that they are working with Pawsitively Tulsa to reduce barriers to spay and neutering. Mandrell also discussed how state statute regulates rescues organizations and their requirements with spaying or neutering animals. Commissioner Chair Savage stated that city ordinance cannot supercede state law. Mandrell also expressed concern that a larger number of purebreds arrive at the shelter and contribute to the problems of pet overpopulation.

Amy Polen shared that she would like to ensure that the Commission continues to provide oversight and supported the idea of creating subcommittees to address issues that affect animal welfare services. Polen expressed concern that a third party was going to come in and help with cleaning and a volunteer noted that there was a cleaning group that came but has not returned. Letcher confirmed that there is not a third-party vendor. Instead the shelter is utilizing temporary staff to address the cleaning. Polen also asked about the Sunday hours. Letcher explained that the shelter is open to the public for adoptions and intake during the expanded hours. Polen also asked about the open adoption process. Letcher confirmed that the stray hold is going to remain. Polen also addressed the concerns about large breed dogs getting spayed or neutering too soon. She recommended that DNA testing provide evidence that the animal needs to delay spay or neutering. She also recommended that one of the subcommittees include representation from Tulsa Police and Sherriff's office as well as Pawsitively Tulsa to address stray animals that could be picked up by volunteers.

Ruth Steinberger shared that she wanted to address the release of animals from the shelter that are intact. She explained that several animals are in fact released from the shelter still intact. She said that in 2018, 62% of animals left the shelter intact. She said that her organization currently offers spay and neutering for \$48 and has the capacity to support rescues organizations if needed.

Steinberger also supported the idea of TAW working with reserve officers. She stated that in rural counties reserve officers provide support to addressing stray dogs. She said that these reserve officers receive CLEET training.

She expressed concern about lowering restrictions to adopting animals either by lowering cost or not screening potential families. She said that lowering standards does not address pet overpopulation issues. She said also that large mixed breeds could get already get a veterinarian exemption under state law, that was passed in 1986.

She also expressed concern that most of the language in the ordinance was vague and unenforceable. She cited national standards that allowed officers to cite someone that was not providing humane treatment to animals. She also shared that there are terms and conditions that could be written into the ordinance that would allow for residents to improve conditions before they enter the judicial system. She said that she would follow up with an email that provides more objective standards that could be included in the ordinance.

Jana Proffitt Davis shared that 99.9% rescue organizations ensure that pure bred animals are spayed and neutered before they are adopted out. Proffitt Davis said that pure bred rescues are more responsible and qualified in vetting families before taking in a pure bred and for this reason should have priority to take in a pure-bred animals that come into the shelter. Commissioner Chair Savage requested that Proffitt Davis come back with data that confirms her statements.

Proffitt Davis also shared that she would like for the ordinance to focus on people who are not following the laws, particularly the exemption permit fees. She expressed that she would want to pay for one fee.

She also questioned why the ordinance proposed to limit the number of dogs, if they are spayed or neutered. Proffitt Davis also expressed that it should be included in the ordinance that the shelter should scan animals that come into the shelter for microchip information and if the

animal is found to have microchip information, that the owner be contacted and must be returned.

Proffitt Davis expressed that the proposed changes to the exemption permits would give up their rights to search and seizure. Commissioner Burkett clarified that search and seizure is different from inspection. Proffitt Davis said that she sees those terms as the same.

Proffitt Davis also stated that the ordinance should include language that prohibits rescue organizations from importing animals. Proffitt Davis also expressed that there should be considerations to types of dog size and type in relation to land restrictions. For example, she stated that a person could easily have 50 Pomeranians on one acre of land.

Commissioner Chair Savage adjourned the meeting at 8:15pm.