

Here are the minutes of the Wytheville meeting held on Saturday, 11/20/04.

This was the fourth of the “November round” meetings, and this was another good meeting.

Our intention is to summarize the conclusions from the November meetings and to, as indicated by the will of Virginia Voters for Animal Welfare, suggest language for any legislation which VVAW will submit to the General Assembly in January, 2005.

In addition, we will continue to reach out to each constituency involved in Virginia’s animal welfare, meeting with each group, and urging their support of the efforts of VVAW.

The schedule for the previous week (week of 11/15/04) included meetings with staffers to Governor Warner, Marge McClung who heads the Virginia breeders organization, and with doctors Butts, Cardin, and Wilkes of the Office of the State Veterinarian.

This week (week of 11/22/04) includes Don’s trip to Kentucky to meet with lowered cost/high volume vet, Dr. Michael McDonald.

Lillian Clancy and Don Marro

A meeting regarding of the Virginia Voters for Animal Welfare focused on pet overpopulation started at 11:00 am at the Ramada Inn in Wytheville on Saturday, 11/20/04.

Attendees:

Joan Baldwin/Smyth County Humane Society
Lillian Clancy
Sarah Dutton/Lost Fantasy Stables & Animal Rescue
Kristin Forbes/independent
Will Forbes/independent
Barbara Johns/independent
Howard Manley/independent
Cynthia Matthews/independent – or Family Resource Center
Donald Marro
Nanette Quinn/independent
Cindy Ross/Galen Presbyterian
Betty Tietjen/Wythe County Humane Society

unable to attend:

All who committed to coming came – and more! Thanks!

Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves and spoke briefly of the group with which they are affiliated or otherwise described their reasons for attending.

Agenda

1. The meeting started with Lillian Clancy listing the top three priorities of VVAW: s/n, elimination of gas chambers, and support/upgrade of the animal control function. However, regardless of programs, nothing will change unless program ideas are funded.

FUNDING

2. Don Marro discussed the \$32 million per year currently spent on animal welfare activities (pounds, animal control, etc.) in Virginia, the money coming from Virginia's general fund. There is competition for general fund money from many, including police, schools, libraries, and so on. With a climate opposed to increased taxes, there will continue to be insufficient money for animal welfare. There is a requirement to get money for animal welfare programs, however.

Don continued by describing the model used by those who buy licenses to hunt or fish, the proceeds from which are dedicated to hunting and fishing programs, making those activities and programs self-sustaining.

The same could be true but is not, for dog licenses. Dog licenses are mandated state-wide, and cats can be required to be licensed as well. A cap on dog license fees of \$10 was established in the early 1980s. There is virtually no compliance in purchasing of dog licenses in some jurisdictions to a high of 15% compliance in others, and lack of compliance is coupled with low fees. With some 2 million owned dogs in Virginia, not enough is collected from license sales to come close to the inadequate \$32 million now spent on animal welfare state-wide.

For licenses to be a viable vehicle for funding animal welfare programs, there needs to be higher fees and a much higher level of compliance. Reasons compliance is low include:

- . don't know license is required
- . don't know where to get a license
- . believe the rabies tag is the license
- . already pay taxes and that money is not being used properly
- . inconvenient to get to city hall/county seat to buy

Don continued by suggesting those at the meeting could go to the local County Board of Supervisors advocating a way to make it easier to get a license, and could also indicate their support for a rise in the cap for licenses. The presentation to the Board of Supervisors could include the argument that sufficient income from dog/cat licenses could fund animal welfare totally without using property tax funds, freeing those funds for other programs.

At \$35 per license for the first animal, and with 70% compliance, 10% with multi-dog households, 10% non-compliant and 10% receiving free licenses because of inability to pay, some \$60 million could be raised. This would exceed the current amount spent on

animal control (\$32 million) and leave funds for free or low cost s/n, upgrading the animal control function, etc.

Don said one benefit of free licenses to someone who cannot afford to pay is that it starts the process of identifying where the dogs and cats are, and who the owners are.

Currently there is a \$150 penalty for dogs not licensed, but it is not consistently enforced, partly because animal control is overworked, and partly because judges give a slap on the wrist to first time offenders.

Don suggested that a raise in the cap for licenses could be positioned as something that is both for the people as property tax relief and for the animals as a means to shelter, s/n, and upgrade animal control officers.

3. Joan Baldwin said that her county charges but \$5 for a female dog, \$3 for a male, and \$1 for a sterilized dog, and making matters worse, the Smyth County pound may not charge those who adopt animals from it. She attributes this to the County Board of Supervisors which believes people will not pay more in a county which is quite poor and has few employment opportunities.

Don Marro offered to come with Joan to meet with her Board of Supervisors if that would be helpful to her, but cautioned that his style is very direct.

4. Joan Baldwin said it is not convenient for people to purchase dog licenses, and she said the dog problem in her county is made worse by not having a leash law. She mentioned a woman in the county who asked the Board of Supervisors to enact a leash law that was denied with the reasoning that all the dogs in the county would need to be tied up if that was done.

Sarah Dutton said she has found a similar problem in her area.

Don Marro said this stems from the concept of dogs as personal property.

Joan added that even with a leash law, there would be limited compliance, and no people or money to enforce such a law.

5. Don Marro indicated the proposed legislation raising the cap on license fees would have a provision for sending a portion of the proceeds from the wealthier parts of Virginia to those jurisdictions needing financial help once all jurisdictions enacted higher fees and sought full compliance.
6. Kristin Forbes asked whether it would be cheaper and easier to raise property taxes for animal welfare programs.

Don Marro responded that it is very hard to raise property taxes, plus license fees would be ear-marked for animal welfare, even though there is no guarantee there would never be a diversion of earmarked funds in case of emergency.

7. Howard Manley wondered if higher license fees would deter those with limited means who take in dogs and cats and care for them with very few resources.

Don answered that the local jurisdiction would decide for how long and to how many free licenses would apply.

Don mentioned that the State Veterinarian, Dr. Butts, in a meeting earlier in the week, mentioned seeking a ruling from the Virginia Attorney General who said it was abandonment when cats are trapped, neutered, and returned with the way the law currently stands. A change in this may need to be considered.

8. Cindy Ross expressed a cultural concern and suggested that a needs assessment may need to be done first in this area before asking people to comply with new regulation.

Don Marro said the change in license fee caps is left to local jurisdictions who could use higher license fees as a tool as appropriate. He asked Cindy if more money was needed. She said yes, but she would like to consider the process required to make change.

9. Kristin Forbes brought up the need for education, and if the situation currently allows dogs to run freely and there is insufficient animal control to make that different, education may provide the only answer.

10. Joan Baldwin said that she works on a program with 6th graders about the pet overpopulation problem. She sees a current rate of 75% euthanization, and that rate continues to get bigger. Residents breed and sell, and education would be a big plus.

Don Marro announced a bill is planned for the upcoming session of the General Assembly for humane education. He described the “Shelter Dogs Dream of Homes” project initiated by Cynthia Mantalos and described in Charlottesville meeting minutes, the paintings from which will hang in the General Assembly this session. Don said with education, there can be cultural change, but it may not be with this generation.

11. Will Forbes said that licensing won’t work, even if licenses are free. “Country people” won’t do it, he believes, nor will they participate in free s/n programs.

Don Marro challenged that, saying that if one permits mind set to prevail, then it will. Don pointed out that a farmer with 10 cattle dogs has an investment, and licensing is a way to protect that investment.

12. Will Forbes said the program will need to be sold to farmers, to children, to boards of supervisors, and even to vets to get them willing to distribute licenses.

Don Marro noted he would ask Dr. Escobar who heads the VVMA to support having Virginia vets issue dog licenses.

13. Cindy Forbes said she sees success as being incremental.
14. Howard Manley discussed the common thinking that if a dog has been s/n, it won't hunt and isn't "fit".

Joan Baldwin agreed, saying her group gets many questions from the hunting community.

Kristin Forbes said some feel that if a dog isn't smart enough to get out of the road to avoid being hit by a car, it deserves to be hit.

15. Kristin Forbes wondered about providing an option for a vasectomy vs. a typical neuter so the testosterone levels stay with the dog. This would provide health benefits to the dog, as well as helping convince those who are reluctant to neuter working dogs, often believing that neutering lessens their abilities as hunting dogs. She continued, if the testosterone levels were the same, then those using that argument would have not ground to stand on.
16. The group talked about getting high profile endorsers of s/n generally, and for the hunting community particularly.

Kristin Forbes said, in addition to Nascar, wrestlers could potentially do that.

Will Forbes said, provided with enough info, he will work with the NRA and see what kind of impact can be made. Don Marro said he would help Will with this project if he wants help.

Will Forbes said the myth could be dispelled by education.

Kristin Forbes suggested that Ted Nugent should be approached to help. Sarah Dutton supported that suggestion, saying he would be a great endorser as many people know him, and know he is an avid hunter.

Will Forbes indicated that he might be able to make that kind of contact, perhaps getting Nugent to advocate s/n pictured with his labs.

17. The comments then returned to pets as property.

Sarah Dutton said animals in the area are not seen as pets, but as property.

Joan Baldwin said that mountain people tend to be very independent, and while they can be approached by policemen, individuals or those in animal welfare roles would have a difficult time.

18. Barbara Johns asked about a potential state-level task force, and how it might help with compliance.

Don said that all interested groups would be invited to participate and look for both the obvious and not-so-obvious methods to make it easier to become compliant.

19. Cindy Ross indicated that licenses in the Durham area for an un-neutered dog may be \$70, but she did not recall the source of the information.

INSPECTIONS

20. Cindy Ross asked about how to find out about inspection records, and what it takes to have a facility be in compliance.

21. Howard Manley wondered if visits by those who perform inspections need to be announced.

Don Marro said a reason given for inspections to be announced is to ensure that someone is at the facility. He continued with a description of the situation in Page County where there was a history of non-compliance which was ended only by the imposition of civil fines.

22. Cindy Ross wondered whether the State Vet, Dr. Butts, would help her pound be inspected.

Don Marro suggested, instead of appealing to the state vet, get a local member of the General Assembly to push on it. He further suggested that someone be there during the inspection, and for Cindy to be there as well. Any infractions can result in civil fines of \$1000 per day per violation.

Cindy wondered if “accreditation teams” exist. Don responded by saying that HSUS will do shelter evaluations, but they are costly to conduct.

23. Joan Baldwin indicated their facility is plagued with parvo problems, and no isolation means have been made available to them. Dogs have died, and dogs have been adopted out with parvo. She added that there is an unusual restriction on allowing potential adopters to touch the dogs prior to adopting; visitors to the facility are not allowed to touch the animals.

Don Marro indicated this may be the result of fearing for dog bites, and that Joan should ask if this came from the County Attorney or Commonwealth Attorney in their jurisdiction.

GAS CHAMBERS

24. Don Marro noted that gas chambers are not the preferred method of euthanasia per the state vet, but an accepted method. He said he believes Dr. Butts does not prefer gas, and that the Deputy State Vet, Dr. Cardin, has a gas chamber survivor dog as a pet. Don described a fund of \$25,000 he will make available as transition funding for jurisdictions moving from gas to I/V euthanasia.

25. Betty Tietjen mentioned grants she has used for animal work when in North Carolina.

Don Marro said that local businesses in other counties have been a source of funding. He also suggested that funding could come from Kathy Savesky and the foundation she represents. He said the foundation was supporting Spay Virginia which has 3 lowered cost s/n locations, but none are yet operational.

Joan Baldwin indicated she will be taking some animals to the Spay Virginia facility when it opens in Bristol. She noted she had taken animals earlier to Angels of Assisi, but found a limit on the size of dogs which could be done. She would prefer to require s/n at the shelter and do s/n ahead of adoption, saying such a program would ultimately save money.

RELEASING AGENCY CHANGE

26. Don Marro discussed that while releasing agencies are to have animals that leave them sterilized within 30 days, it is often not performed.

As a result, he would like legislation to require every releasing agency to s/n prior to release, and redefine releasing agencies to include pet shops and casual, for-profit backyard breeders in addition to shelters, pounds, rescues, and humane societies.

He talked about the classified ad project, also available on the website, which shows the dimension of the problem. He specifically drew the distinction between casual backyard breeders and hobby/fancier responsible breeders who are plagued by the casual backyard breeders' bad practices. He discussed the attitude of Marge McClung who heads the professional breeders group in Virginia, and hopes that reputable breeders will seek to make the change in releasing agency definition. He added that Ms. McClung is appalled at the activities of casual, for-profit backyard breeders.

27. Joan Baldwin agreed that such a change is sorely needed, and discussed the case of the sale of a blind puppy by a casual backyard breeder outside Virginia, but the dog being sold to people living in Virginia.

Don said that the code of Virginia expressly protects against this, and if one does business in Virginia, even by advertising in Virginia, one is subject to Virginia courts and Virginia law. Further, he noted, the sale of such a dog may well be a breach of implied warranty.

28. Kristin Forbes wondered about having a dog s/n which has somehow gotten into the pound, but is really an owned dog.

It was suggested that if the owner retrieves in the required time and can convince authorities that the dog is the owner's, it needn't be sterilized prior to release.

29. The requirement for business license, income tax filing, and sales tax payment was discussed for those doing casual breeding.

Kristin Forbes wondered how such breeders would be found.

Don Marro said by tracking classified ads and having enough animal control people, it could be done.

30. Kristin Forbes wondered if there might be legislation introduced which said animals cannot be sold before it is 7 weeks old.

IDENTIFICATION/CHIPPING

31. Don Marro described the micro-chipping study which found competing technologies and registration of information about owners of animals not being maintained or current. The chipping survey is almost complete.

He told of a need to regard chipping as part of responsible ownership, and that knowing the animals' source and owner would ultimately improve re-homing, accountability, and lower costs by keeping animals out of the system.

32. Kristin Forbes wondered why tattoos were not preferred to microchips, and said the FDA is unsure, she believes, about the safety of implanting chips. She mentioned a database of tattoo information and will find that information and share it with the group.

Don Marro said a value in having these meetings is bringing together new people and hearing new ideas.

The meeting was adjourned at 1 pm.