

Here are the minutes of the Newport News meeting held on Sunday, 11/21/04.

This was the fifth 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 Hampton Inn in Newport News on Sunday, 11/21/04.

Attendees:

Lillian Clancy
Sherry Eaton/Mid-Atlantic Great Dane Rescue
Debra Griggs/Animal Rescue of Tidewater
Donald Marro
Nancy Peterson/Animal Aid Society

unable to attend:

Debbie Bronk
Reggie Connaughton
Janet Farrar
Tonya Higgins
Joella Hughes
Erica Mascarello
Denise Pons
Gene Thayer

Introductions

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

During the introductions Nancy Peterson and Don Marro discussed some ways her church might become involved the issue of pet overpopulation. Nancy said her church generally does not get involved in issues like this. Don asked that Nancy see if she can identify the person at the state level who is responsible for church policy and programs.

Debra Griggs offered that a minister in Florida, JR Hyland, has presented compelling Bible-based advocacies. The website for Humane Religion is at www.all-creatures.org; when there, click on Humane Religion to learn about JR Hyland. Debra noted her favorite is the little (but powerful) book entitled The Slaughter of the Terrified Beasts.

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 mechanisms such as a tax on pet food and supplies, and a tax on vet bills, were mentioned, but described as not attractive to the membership of VVAW.

FUNDING

2. Don Marro discussed the \$32 million per year currently spent on animal control activities in Virginia, the money coming from Virginia's general fund. All other local programs (police, schools, etc.) compete for monies in the general fund.
3. Debra Griggs said her area charges \$25 for a license for unaltered dogs and cats with a fee of \$5 for altered dogs and cats. She says there is about 3-4% compliance in the purchase of dog licenses. She added that funds from purchase go to the general fund.
4. Don Marro said without funding there is no means to enforce, though there are pockets of intermittent enforcement.
5. Dr. Escobar, head of the Virginia Veterinary Medical Association, suggested a tax on pet food might be considered. Don said he will advise Dr. Escobar to introduce that funding mechanism if he wishes.
6. Don Marro suggested an alternative for funding would be raising the cap on dog licenses from the present \$10 to a cap of \$35. Local jurisdictions would set the amount for themselves. For anyone who said they could not afford the license, the license would be free, as identification of who has the dogs are is a major part of the issue and the goal. He added there would be a reduced license cost for multiple dog households at the \$2 per dog level for all dogs after the first dog.

He also added there is a current penalty of \$150 for an unlicensed dog. Compliance, nonetheless, ranges from 0 to 15%, part of the problem being the inconvenience of getting a tag under the current system, the belief that a rabies tag is the license, ignorance about the requirement and reluctance to pay more in addition to property taxes when animal welfare programs get short shrift.

Funds raised from license sales would be earmarked for s/n, for free licenses, for s/n, for rabies, and for animal control upgrades. Incremental compliance is most likely but eventually should be significant, much as paying one's taxes or getting hunting or fishing licenses.

7. Sherry Eaton feels part of the problem is that dogs are seen as property.

Don responded by saying that Virginia law categorizes companion animals as property.

8. Lillian Clancy reminded that the cap is only a cap, and the actual cost will be set locally.
9. Don suggested that when all jurisdictions raise their fees, a portion of the funds raised from licenses will go to poorer jurisdictions for funding their programs to level the playing field.
10. Sherry Eaton said she would like to have license plates for Great Danes but is having trouble getting a member of the General Assembly to support this. She noted that she will try again this session to get such a license plate.
11. Debra Griggs suggested that local legislators in her district with whom she had worked before might be members of the General Assembly who could be contact to co-sponsor legislation about license fees.

Don said there is already one sponsor on board; Don described him as an anti-tax Republican.

GAS CHAMBERS

12. Lillian Clancy expressed her belief that Dr. Butts, the State Veterinarian, could outlaw gas chambers.
13. Don Marro said Dr. Butts, in a meeting earlier in the week, said that I/V euthanasia is preferred.

Don discussed a fund to be established (possibly in the name of a dog adopted by Dr. Cardin, the Deputy State Vet, that dog a gas chamber survivor). Don and Lillian Clancy will personally fund \$25,000 for transition from gas to I/V euthanasia for jurisdictions unable to do so financially.

14. Don Marro mentioned that during the meeting this week, Dr. Butts indicated he will be leaving his post as State Veterinarian as of 1/1/05 and will then head an emergency services function.

INSPECTION

15. Don Marro spoke of the 134 facilities to be inspected annually by the office of Dr. Butts, and said Dr. Butts feels this can be accomplished by a single person annually.
16. Don described the situation in Page County with its public pound out of compliance. The scrutiny brought on non-compliance by local media, by rescue, by the sheriff and the \$134,000 in civil fines levied against Page, ultimately resulted in the construction of a new Page facility at the cost of \$500,000. Don credited the yeoman work of Patti Stinson, Eileen McAfee, Carmen Cline and others for this monumental success.

Don noted that Dr. Butts was at the dedication of the new Page County shelter last week as were he and Lillian Clancy.

Debra Griggs said that one of the most exciting things about the change in Page County was that it began by relentless grass-roots rescuers who were not necessarily perceived as having any powerful access to the system.

Sherry Eaton suggested that Patti Stinson, a major force in the Page campaign, should do inspections of Virginia's pounds.

RELEASING AGENCY

17. Lillian Clancy wants to change the procedure regarding s/n when a dog or cat is adopted from a promise that the s/n be done within 30 days of adoption to surgery prior to adoption. This is more likely to happen if money is generated from license fees.
18. Don Marro suggested that the definition of releasing agencies be expanded to include pet stores and casual, for-profit backyard breeders. He indicated that Marge McClung who heads Virginia's breeder's organization has voiced her support for such a change, and believes backyard breeders tarnish responsible, reputable breeders.

Debra Griggs asked about the group that Marge McClung represents.

19. Sherry Eaton indicated that backyard breeders are a continual problem, and her group continues to do fund-raising to eliminate their impact.
20. Debra Griggs said there could be few better examples of the horrible situation than the rescue in January, 2003, of 120 labs from an AKC breeder who became mentally incapacitated. There are few better examples of irresponsible breeding than this situation, where rescuers physically carried out dog after dog that were living in standing water.

21. Don Marro said state law imposes a burden of providing dog pounds on jurisdictions, yet does not fund them. Only with a high level of compliance in the purchase of dog licenses would there be a way to replace the \$32 million now spent by Virginia to run the public pounds.

Therefore no substitution of license fees for current funding would occur until present levels of general fund funding are exceeded.

22. Don reviewed the study done of two Sunday issues of the Washington Post. Some \$2.3 million in revenue from ads for dogs sales in a single issue were not taxed, no business license fees collected in virtually all cases, and no payment of sales tax assumed in virtually all cases. Don added that the penalties are significant for operating a business without a license.

Don suggested that those advertising need to have a business licenses and pay taxes. Failure to do either would provide to animal control another tool to move from a culture of non-compliance to compliance.

23. Don noted that license fee legislation would be “pulled” if there was any change made to it that weakened it.
24. Don noted that Marge McClung’s group has a code of ethics. He asked if the group would like to see him discuss with her how to get backyard breeders to adopt such ethics.
25. Debra Griggs discussed her involvement with SB260. The previous State Vet, Dr. Sims, did not want some portions of SB260 enacted and he recommended changes to the bill.
26. Debra Griggs spoke of the registration of feral cat colonies, the illegality of feeding a stray in Virginia, and wondered where PETA stood on ferals. She noted she is an advocate of feral cat colony registration in municipalities where registering will not place the registrant (colony manager) at risk for breaking the law.

Don added that Dr. Butts, during the meeting earlier this week, mentioned that he asked the Attorney General about feral cats and was told that when cats are part of a TNR program, “release” constitutes abandonment under Virginia law.
27. Debra Griggs uses a statistics from the AVMA regarding ferals, saying there is 1 cat for every 2 households in the US.

HUMANE EDUCATION

28. Don discussed the “Shelter Animals Dream of Homes” (see the Charlottesville meeting minutes for details) and said the art work from the project will be on display in Richmond during the General Assembly’s session in January. There will also be an effort to bring the work to the halls of the Cannon Office Building in Washington DC.

29. Nancy Peterson would like to work on a US postage stamp promoting adoption of shelter animals.

Don wondered if she would consider having a private stamp. He also asked if there might be a bounty paid to someone who adopted from a shelter and referred a second adopter. Nancy said there is not enough money to do this. Sherry Eaton agreed. There is simply not enough money to do that now.

Don wondered, as an alternative, if there might not be a local businessman donor who would give matching grants in such circumstances.

MICRO-CHIPPING

30. Don indicated that identification of companion animals is a goal, but it is not clear how best to achieve it. Tattooing doesn't appear to work successfully enough.

Chips have competing technologies and registration issues. It would be easiest if releasing agencies chipped, that chipping be paid for with the license, and that registration somehow be made easier, more efficient, and current.

31. Sherry Eaton said the FDA requires that all prostheses implanted are chipped, and that such chipping is mandated. She wonders if the implanting agency couldn't be responsible for registration.

Don Marro noted that some agencies do the registration themselves.

The meeting was adjourned at 1 pm