

Meeting Minutes – McLean (Northern Virginia) - Pet Overpopulation Study Group – Sunday, 11/7/04

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Here are the minutes from the McLean/Northern Virginia meeting of 11/7/04.

This was the first of the “November round” meetings. Other meetings scheduled are:

Saturday, 11/13	11 am – 1 pm	Roanoke
Sunday, 11/14	11 am – 1 pm	Charlottesville
Saturday, 11/20	11 am – 1 pm	Wyethville
Sunday, 11/21	11 am – 1 pm	Newport News or Norfolk
IF we get enough committed to attending:		
Saturday, 11/27	11 am – 1 pm	Harrisonburg
Sunday, 11.28	11 am – 1 pm	Richmond

This was another good meeting, and also a long 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 want submitted to the General Assembly in January, 2005.

In addition, Don and I 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.

Lillian Clancy and Don Marro

NOTE: Allegra Wood, Valerie Bannister, and Gwynne Mason worked on and brought a draft version of a project which addresses the potential flow of information and responsibilities for VVAW communications. The meeting ran longer than anticipated, and their work did not get discussed. It is hoped they will present their ideas at a subsequent meeting.

Because of the same time issue, the work that Gwynne Mason did regarding business issues of establishing low cost s/n operations was not presented. It is hoped that Gwynne will present her plan at a subsequent meeting.

Thanks to you Allegra, Valerie, and Gwynne for your efforts, and sorry about the clock!

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A meeting regarding the pet overpopulation study started at 11:00 am at the Dranesville District Government Center in McLean on Sunday, 11/7/04.

attendees:

Valerie Bannister/Piedmont Feline Rescue League
Lillian Clancy
Sharon Cornett/Richmond Animal League
Sandy Echeverry/HART
Kim Kincheloe/Kincheloe S/N Clinic
Virgina Kincheloe/Kincheloe S/N Clinic
Melissa Klein/Humane Society of Fairfax County
Susanne Kogut/Hot Water Rescue
Donald Marro
Gwynne Mason/independent
Sharon McCamy/independent
Annie Pelfrey/independent; member, Central VA Collie Club; Volunteer w/ Operation Catnip
Jennifer L. H. Porter/Northern Virginia Animal League (Prince William County)

unable to attend:

Jean Duffy
Terry Dunn
Rosalie Lesser
Sandy Scholar
Allegra Wood

Introductions

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

1. Lillian Clancy opened the meeting by thanking Melissa Klein for arranging the venue for this and the previous northern Virginia meeting, and for personally paying for the first meeting site. Thank you, Melissa. Yes, we owe you a fancy dinner!

Lillian Clancy continued by saying that there are several key issues for VVAW to consider for final evaluation, but, if proposing any legislation is anticipated, there must be a funding mechanism in place to support implementation and enforcement of that legislation.

2. Don Marro listed the key issues:
dog licensing as the most likely source for funding change
releasing agency definition change
gas chamber elimination
mandatory identification of dogs/cats

3. dog licenses

The discussion below followed and concerns primarily licensing issues:

There appear to be some 2 million dogs in Virginia and with dog licenses being purchased by only 10-15% of dog owners, compliance is not the culture, and so money collected amounts to very little compared with the costs of animal control, which is some \$32 million without capital investment and depreciation.

If a compliance rate of 80% were achieved, there would be more money, even at the current fee structure, but still well below the amount needed to be self-sustaining.

Don pointed out that hunting and fishing licenses are used as a dedicated funding stream for an oversight agency. Such groups, as a result, have no excuses for not doing something because funds are lacking as they DO have the money.

Don surmises that compliance in other regulatory areas should carry over to compliance with dog licensing but for the issue of not seeing good, direct benefit to the animals.

If fees were raised and compliance achieved at the 80% level, some \$48 million could be raised. With \$32 million currently spent on animal control state-wide, raising fees and achieving an 80% compliance goal would fund the entire animal control budget as it currently exists, and leave additional funds to be used on s/n, etc.

Don mentioned that there is a fine currently on the books (possibly \$150?) for failing to license a dog. He says it is rarely enforced, and when the infraction is brought to court, failure is too often forgiven and the charges dismissed.

Don would like to promote a “zero tolerance” policy re licensing with the local judiciary.

- a. Melissa Klein asked if there was any state which has an 80% compliance rate.
- b. Sharon McCamy suggested that people will pay for a license if they know where the money goes, and if the money goes to a place where it helps the animals.
- c. Sandy Echeverry commented that she felt it is probably easier for jurisdictions to monitor drivers' licenses, hunting licenses and such, than monitoring dog licenses.
- d. Don Marro characterized monitoring for driver's licenses as random enforcement, which could also be the case in checking for dog licenses.
- e. Gwynne Mason says there are some places she is familiar with that do check for dog licenses.
- f. Susanne Kogut asked why people couldn't be stopped and asked for licenses, suggesting that doing so might start a culture change regarding license compliance.
- g. Several (Gwynne Mason and Annie Pelfrey at least) noted that they were non-compliant because the money doesn't go directly to serve the animals, and Annie noted that her animals are s/n, so not causing population problems.
- h. Gwynne Mason noted that there is little info provided to the public about dog licenses, such as reminders about getting a license in the same way other licenses and renewals and taxes are prompted by fliers in with bills, etc.
- i. Don suggested that for those who cannot afford licenses, free licenses could be available as a first step in creating a culture of compliance.
- j. Don said if the current legislation says license fees "can" be used for animal welfare, the word "can" should be changed to "shall".
- k. Jennifer Porter suggested that a license fee of \$35 would be difficult for some to pay.
- l. Melissa Klein suggested a need for consistency in the "pay" vs "free" license concept.

In response to that, Don Marro wondered about asking for a means test, but then making a means test discretionary.

- m. Sharon Cornett wondered why free licenses were being considered. Is it because a license is a start at getting animals and owners identified?

In response, Don Marro answered:

to become accustomed to licensing as being part of pet custody to get as much income as possible, and then be able to determine the short-fall which may exist for funding animal control, s/n, etc. create an environment in which, even with some free licenses, penalties are equitably administered, either dollar penalties or in community service for those unable to pay

- n. Melissa Klein asked if other states are using an honor system to determine who gets free licenses. She also wondered if animal control people would enforce this.

Don responded by saying there are animal control people who have supported fees and increasing the price of licenses.

- o. Valerie Bannister said there needs to be a way for the jurisdictions to get reminders to pet owners about licensing.
- p. Sharon Cornett suggested there will be those jurisdictions which balk at spending 5 cents for a flier to remind people to buy licenses.
- q. Don Marro, who lives in Fauquier County, indicated there was a concern in Fauquier if kennel license fees were changed for foxhunt groups. Don proposed that current kennel license procedures not be changed as to hunt groups.
- r. Sharon McCamy said that in Fauquier, the office of the Treasurer handles licensing, but this may not be the practice throughout the state. She suggested that the historic origins of licensing be remembered – that because dogs were running loose and killing livestock, licenses were instituted. Any strategy for change must factor this in. She added that if more money from licenses is the goal, there must be a plan to ensure that funding goes where we want it to go.
- s. Susanne Kogut asked when a decision could be made about the dog license issue.

Don responded by saying there are constituencies which are being contacted for support of license fee increases, and that those groups need to make the decision. He noted the county boards of supervisors will likely support that change if the humane/rescue groups in their county push for that change. He also noted that sheriffs and the association of county government must also sign on.

Don noted that the principal reason to push for licensing change is to generate sufficient revenue for necessary programs.

- t. Melissa Klein agreed that licensing can be part of an identification goal.
- u. Kim Kincheloe says the language of the law needs to change so that money goes to animals.

- v. Susanne Kogut wondered how to evaluate the potential for being successful in moving forward on this issue.
 - w. Sharon McCamy feels that “pet lovers are endemic”, and that this would be a way to fund low cost s/n which would be of value and appeal to the general public, and a way to generate support among the larger populace who are pet owners. She also suggested that the license fee increase be viewed as part of a public safety/public health program, not just animal welfare.
 - x. Annie Pelfrey suggested that there is already a model for doing some of this and mentioned a directory of animal groups which could be used.
 - y. Sharon Cornett said changes in licenses will have a better chance of success if the public sees licenses as a way to protect them. Perhaps the impetus for change could be tied to rabies in the goal of finding “something in it for me” as a reason to support change.
 - z. Virginia and Kim Kincheloe told of their encouragement of their Board of Supervisors in Spotsylvania County to go see the local shelter to see how woefully below standards it was. Over the years, change was slowly and painfully made, with the result that a new shelter was built to bring the county into “structural” compliance. And to assist the county in becoming compliant with s/n regulations, the Kincheloes negotiated a public/private partnership where their group was provided space in the new shelter to operate a low cost s/n clinic. Currently there is no adoption from the Spotsylvania shelter without the animal first being sterilized at the clinic.
 - aa. Don Marro wondered if the current cap on dog license fees of \$10 is a cap established in the early 1980’s when \$10 went somewhat farther. (The cap is set by state regulation; actual licensing fees are set by the locality and vary. Proposals to raise the licensing fee specifically reference raising the state-regulated cap for localities to \$35.00 so that a locality has the option to charge up to \$35.00 for a dog license.)
4. releasing agency
The discussion below concerns the change in defining “releasing agency” to include pet stores and casual, backyard for-profit breeders of the kind who advertise in the Washington Post or similar.
- a. Don Marro discussed the change in language, noting that pet stores and casual, backyard for-profit breeders are not required to s/n animals which leave them as shelters and rescues are required to do.

He proposed that pet stores and casual, backyard for-profit breeders also be required to s/n.

He suggested exemptions for fanciers, breed improvers and hobby breeders, and for those “sequestering” their animal, and for those who intend to breed their animal. Casual, backyard for-profit breeders would be subject to the business license and tax reporting requirements as any other business in Virginia.

- b. Annie Pelfrey said her experience is that owners will, in general, seek to have their animal sterilized if they see that surgery as good for the health of the animal.
- c. Jennifer Porter wondered about the impact on “hobby breeders”.

Don Marro said there was no impact and further suggested VVAW reach out to responsible breeders to police their own.

- d. Sandy Echeverry commented about the selling done by back-yard-breeders.

Don Marro suggested that this is a 2-step process: first, involve responsible breeders, and then encourage adherence to a code of ethics.

- e. Sharon Cornett noted that current law has the onus on the owner in terms of who is responsible for ensuring an animal be sterilized.
- f. Melissa Klein offered that this would provide another tool to “up” the s/n rate.
- g. Don Marro noted that first the definition is changed, and then the onus falls on the group having the animal initially, to have the surgery done before ownership is transferred. There could also be a greater penalty for failure to comply.
- h. Gwynne Mason said there are some, herself included, having dogs but having gotten those dogs from other than “a releasing agency” – i.e., a stray needing a home.

Someone responded by saying we can try, but the definitions will never cover 100%.

- i. Annie Pelfrey says some releasing agencies do not charge sufficiently to cover the things which need to be done with an animal.
- j. Kim Kincheloe said their experience is that people WILL pay for s/n, and their group is self-sustaining. She feels a s/n clinic can be self-sustaining without being for profit.

- k. Don Marro suggested that the steps here are to get county boards of supervisors to favor change in requiring business licenses and collection of sales tax on these currently uncollected revenue streams.
- l. Melissa Klein wondered about “enabling” vs. “mandatory” language in legislation.
- m. Susanne Kogut voiced her support of such s/n legislation.
- n. Jennifer Porter asked that exceptions be considered, especially when man power issues are concerned. Follow-up on s/n takes time and people.
- o. Sandy Echeverry noted that her group does effective follow-up on s/n after adoptions.
- p. Kim Kincheloe suggested that Jennifer Porter use Kincheloe’s group for s/n to avoid manpower questions.
- q. Sharon McCamy suggested looking at the Spotsylvania model, of which the Kincheloes are a part, as a model public/private success story that could be emulated in other jurisdictions.

5. gas chambers

The following is the discussion of gas chamber elimination.

- a. Don Marro said VVAW overwhelmingly has voiced its support for eliminating gas chambers, although there may be some transition time necessary for compliance. He further described the issue as one with both economic and philosophic components.
- b. Susanne Kogut suggested looking at gas chamber use in other states.
- c. Don Marro wondered if vets would speak up to outlaw gas chambers.
- d. Melissa Klein feels that this is a do-able bill, and that this would be an issue in which to illustrate the horror.
- e. Susanne Kogut asked whether outlawing gas chambers is an issue that needs to be legislated.

Lillian Clancy said she believes the State Veterinarian could outlaw it with his signature.

Don Marro said this is an issue that can go to the legislature, but he hopes that local jurisdictions with gas chambers can be persuaded to change; persuasion could most effectively come from VVMA, the State Vet, and sheriffs.

6. mandatory identification

This is the discussion concerning mandatory identification.

- a. Susanne Kogut described her study of the issue of chipping for identification. Chipping can be done on an animal of any age and size including birds and reptiles.

An open question is whether only vets may chip.

There has been confusion over different chips available and the availability of scanners to check for chips by various agencies.

She noted that the ISO chip is the newest technology, and is required for entire countries as a method of identification in some European nations. The ISO chip, because it is not in widespread use in the US, resulted in a dog in Virginia with an ISO chip being euthanized.

Most jurisdictions scan animals for chips but do not often find chips. When there are chips, the chips are typically assigned to the person who purchased the chip, usually a breeder or a vet. Information about a pet is not updated, some owners do not know their pet is chipped, and it frequently takes many calls to track down the owner of a chipped animal because registration is not updated. Two companies, 24 PetWatch and ___ have registration information on line.

- b. Jennifer Porter talked about changing information on a chip.
- c. Sharon Cornett says her group chips all their animals prior to adoption, and her group updates and files the registration information for the new owner.
- d. Valerie Bannister says there are several cats in her rescue which have been chipped, but there was no way to get the original information from the pet store or any other source.
- e. Susanne Kogut says it is unclear who can chip, but if those who are not vets are giving shots in a shelter, for instance, it seems as though that same facility could chip.

She added that chips range from \$4.95 to \$11.95 from the source. Buying from a vet adds to the cost as the price of an office visit is sometimes added to the total.

- f. Don Marro asked if the group would want to seek mandatory chipping.
- g. Susanne Kogut says there are business issues between some American companies and the European ISO chip, with few states (Oregon and Wisconsin) legally able

to use ISO chips. She continued that a coalition was put together during Summer, 2004, in Washington DC, to develop a plan, and this is in the shake out period.

Susanne says the license fee plus the cost of chipping may, together, be a problem, and said a compromise might be for only the releasing agency to have to chip as a first step.

- h. Don Marro asked if there is any regulation that prevents someone not a vet chipping, and if finding a way to reduce price make it more attractive.
- i. Melissa Klein suggested phasing in of a program to give time to sort out the vet issue and the technology.
- j. Susanne Kogut noted there is an economic benefit to chipping. In the UK, 18% of chipped animals are returned directly to their owners without spending time (and taxpayer money) in the public pound.

She notes there are questions about who should be the person/agency identified on the chip.

- k. Sharon Cornett says her group has used chips since 1997 and she advocates continuing their use.
- l. Sharon Cornett and Susanne Kogut, while in favor of chipping, do not feel this should be one of the first things to be done.

Susanne Kogut feels credibility could be “blown”.

Don Marro asked when it becomes do-able.

Susanne Kogut supported a position of not doing it along with the licensing, and when it is done, to promote the economics of it, by pointing out that the animal does not enter the shelter system but instead is re-homed, thereby saving taxpayer money.

- 7. In closing, Don Marro indicated that Andrea Perr may be helping us with strategy issues, and he asked Sharon McCamy to help also.

When asked what could be done immediately, Don said nothing should be done until meetings with various constituencies are concluded and a clear mandate emerges.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:50 pm.