

A meeting of the Virginia Voters for Animal Welfare regarding pet overpopulation started at 11:10 am at the Lynchburg Public Library in Lynchburg on Saturday, 4/23/05.

Attendees:

Linda Albert/Planned Pethood Clinic
Butch Bryant/Humane Society for Campbell County
Kathy Bryant/Humane Society for Campbell County
Ginny Burnett/Humane Society for Campbell County
Lillian Clancy/VVAW
Tammy Javier/Planned Pethood Clinic
Donald Marro/VVAW
Dorothy Raasch/Humane Society for Campbell County

Introductions

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

Agenda

1. Don Marro opened the meeting by asking why some humane societies and SPCAs were less active legislatively than others, considering the magnitude of the pet overpopulation problem. He asked if it was because they see no problem, or consider that making legislative change is not important, or whether they are content with incremental change.

He noted specifically that the meeting was being held in Lynchburg, and not one person from the Lynchburg Humane Society was present, even though there had been many attempts to get them to participate.

Lynchburg Humane Society is a member of the Virginia Federation of Humane Societies. A member of the Lynchburg Humane Society, Shelley Stone, is a Regional Director for Spay Virginia, which may account for their indifference to VVAW and their absence.

2. It was said that the Board of some humane societies, and Lynchburg may be an example, are too cautious about what members can do.
3. Ginny Burnett said that some avoid getting involved in legislation as it is an unfamiliar step to take, and some fear doing so.
4. Don responded that there are a number of places where humane societies are active and influential in making change, noting Hanover and Nelson counties particularly.

Don continued that legislative changes require support at the grass roots level because of the Dillon rule in Virginia. Local officials need to endorse the requirement for change to those in the General Assembly, and local officials will only do that when prodded by local grass roots groups.

5. Don believes that legislative changes in the 2006 session of the General Assembly will be made because of a friendly governor, a different legislature, or the impact of grass roots efforts.
6. Ginny Burnett said she would talk with the Campbell County Humane Society and will try to reach all members.
7. Linda Albert suggested perhaps a joint local meeting could initiate change, perhaps including Lynchburg, Campbell, and other nearby counties.
8. Don indicated that the legislature looks to two lobbying groups (Virginia Association of Counties and the Virginia Municipal League) for approval on various local initiatives.

Localities tell their lobbyists what to support, and localities do what their electorates want.

9. Don continued that we met with Bill Murray of Gov. Warner's staff on Friday, 4/22/05, regarding eliminating gas chambers, and Murray indicated that he will confer with the Virginia Association of Counties and the Virginia Municipal League as a preliminary to taking action.
10. Linda Albert opposed the use of gas chambers except for wildlife, particularly when such animals could be a rabies vector. Having been an animal control officer for many years in the City of Salem, she said many wild animals were successfully gassed, whereas I/V euthanasia might be more stressful than gas for wildlife.

Don responded by saying that jurisdictions with no gas chambers still euthanize wildlife successfully. In addition, there are some 14 states no longer using gas, but 21 Virginia jurisdictions still do. Acknowledging he is not qualified to instruct precisely how to humanely euthanize wildlife, it nevertheless is done without the use of gas. Even if there is extra effort involved in EBI, doing the greatest good for the greatest number is the rationale, gas chambers being abused too often and operated unsafely.

11. Linda Albert said she knows that kittens and puppies are being gassed, and this is illegal, but no one watches and no one reports.
12. Lillian Clancy said sample letters to be sent to local officials regarding various VVAW initiative topics are being prepared and will be on the website.
13. Don mentioned various ways VVAW could be structured. It could be a small group which raises money, and perhaps has a full time lobbyist. Alternatively, it could be a large group with many active advocates who work for change locally and in Richmond. He characterizes the second as far more powerful than merely having a lobbyist.
14. Tammy Javier and Don talked about the failure of HB2003, which was opposed by VFHS's paid lobbyist. The result was that independent spay/neuter clinics will not have a tax check-off while another group (VFHS/Spay Virginia) has two checkoffs.
15. Don opts for coming down on the side of being a big organization, and to organize as a C3 and C4.
16. Tammy Javier said that she and Linda Albert are to meet with the Franklin County Board of Supervisors, and asked for advice on how to put a relationship together that works for the animals. She wants "tools" to be well-prepared for that meeting, and indicated that although Franklin County still gasses, she does not see this initial meeting as addressing that issue.

She wants to prevent the county's killing of animals before rescue can take them out and re-home them, mentioning specifically a golden lab that was killed recently even though it could have found a good home.

Don noted that negotiation is possible only if both parties are willing to compromise, and he suggested trying to determine this before the meeting.

He also suggested using economic arguments such as the cost to the county to keep animals, savings by investing in s/n and other ways to pay (higher license fees, dealer permits and business licenses) to help solve the problem.

He also suggested that some depth be added to the presentation by inviting someone from the office of the state vet to attend the meeting as well, or someone from the clergy or County Board of Education.

If all else fails, knowing dogs are going to be gassed, Tammy says she will volunteer to euthanize by I/V much as she hates to start doing it again.

17. Tammy continued that adopting at the Franklin County pound is very difficult as a prospective owner is prevented by two metal fences from getting near the animal or even touching it before committing to adopt that animal.

She says this policy is in place because the county fears liability in case of a dog bite, and that there was a dog bite and an ensuing legal battle over something like this years ago.

18. Ginny Burnett suggested that perhaps two runs could be sponsored by a group that Tammy helps find, and that access be different in those two runs.

19. Don believes the two fences issue is bogus.

20. Butch Bryant asked what happened with the lawsuit.

Don asked that Tammy try to identify and get a copy of the lawsuit.

21. Linda Albert noted that an additional problem regarding access to pound animals is the hours the pound keeps for adoptions. They are open from only 8am to 10 am, and want at 10am to move on to other things.

22. Ginny Burnett wondered if there was a vendetta by the ACO against Tammy.

23. Don said that grass roots efforts can lead to a situation where animal control is not starved for funds as they appear to be in Franklin County.

Linda Albert said that in Salem City there was not a funding issue.

Don encouraged Linda to write for the group how this happened as a model for other places.

24. Linda Albert talked of the incredible sadness of ACOs who often try so hard to save an animal, as saving one from being hit by a car on the road, bringing it to the pound, and subsequently having to kill it.
25. Don said the legislature is not listening to logic from new kids on the block - VVAW. They ignored the possibility of increasing the cap on licenses because it was not a local request, they said.

In reality, however, the legislators go back to the same people they have seen for years at the General Assembly - the paid lobbyists like the Tom Evanses and Teresa Dockerys - who retard affirmative change.

26. Kathy Bryant wanted suggestions about how to get people involved.

Don says that people tend to do what they know how to do. A rescuer will rescue, for example, and resist moving into the activist posture. Coaching and bringing a friend along can help.

Ginny Burnett said she understood perfectly and sees herself, never having voted, as such a person. She says there is fear in what is new.

27. Ginny Burnett said that if some hear the word “breeder” and “spay/neuter” in the same paragraph, they immediately react with fear and resistance.

Don described the situation with HB 2927 which dealt with backyard breeders. Working with vet and breeder groups to build a compromise bill seemed possible, only to have the breeder group under Marge McClung renege on its commitment to work together, requiring that the bill be pulled by Delegate Kilgore.

28. A brief discussion was held about chipping.

Campbell County has no scanner.

Vets resist having people other than vets chip an animal to maintain their business.

29. Ginny Burnett mentioned an upcoming “chip and dip” event.
30. Tammy Javier says her goal is to do s/n free for anyone regardless of economic circumstances.
31. Kathy Bryant asked if letters could be put on the website that members could sign and submit, saying many do not have the time to create their own letter.

32. Returning to why people do not participate in making change, several thoughts were heard:

- feel they have no voice
- get burned out trying
- don't trust politicians
- life already too full; can't do more than what is required to survive daily

33. Kathy Bryant will see if it is possible to do a mailing using government information to those in a given geography.

Don encouraged her to determine what the county can provide. He suggested it might be possible to get a list of those who buy dog licenses. He suggested asking the county for the list, or for the county itself to mail a letter, or to FOIA such information from the local Commissioner of Revenue.

34. Ginny Burnett asked if Linda Albert would share her successful contribution can program.

Linda also mentioned that getting members of the Board of Supervisors to participate in various events can have positive effects. She noted asking a member of the Board to serve as Marshall of a parade, and that has brought the person's continuing interest in her animal work.

35. Tammy Javier said she will distribute brochures and is willing to have her name as the local contact person on them.

Lillian Clancy asked that anyone who would like brochures to distribute needs first to be a VVAW member and to let us (or Dawn & John Morris) know.

36. Don described who he hopes will become members and support VVAW goals – ACOs, shelter and pound people, animal lovers generally, but especially those younger and more racially diverse, and more active male members.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:10 pm.