

A meeting of the Virginia Voters for Animal Welfare regarding the 2006 legislative agenda was held at 11 am on Saturday, 5/21/05, on the campus of James Madison University in Harrisonburg.

Attendees:

Joi Brown  
Lillian Clancy  
Barbara Cohen  
Dana Golder  
Chris Harman  
Melissa Klein  
Don Marro  
Mollie McCurdy  
Dawn Morris  
John Morris  
Chris Wilson

Attendees introduced themselves.

Agenda

1. The meeting started with Don Marro asking those who had not attended a VVAW meeting before to describe something about their work, what they know about VVAW, and what they hope will happen.
2. Joi Brown spoke of her knowledge of organizations in her community and how she will be able to spread the word about VVAW that way.
3. Chris Harman said he wants to make sure VVAW is not seen as “crazies”, but rather as a vehicle to make change legislatively. He noted that even as a new group, VVAW was able to get a piece of legislation passed in the 2005 session. He also mentioned that Delegate Saxman spoke of no “funded mandate” regarding elimination of gas chambers.

Chris noted his background is in marketing.

4. Dana Golder, a resident of Waynesboro, hopes that VVAW will be active in many programs. She feels that local animal treatment is pathetic, and illustrated that with an example of seeing dogs tied up out in the hot sun day after day.
5. Chris Wilson, a student at JMU, feels animals should be treated as friends. He noted there are programs at JMU that push groups to become involved in making change, and with the school as large as it is, JMU could be a good place to enlist people and participation.
6. Barbara Cohen spoke of her many years as a humane investigator, and said that over those years she has seen little change in animal welfare. Her group, Northern Virginia SPCA, has a very large membership, and those on the Board tend to be the most involved. She chairs the dog committee.
7. Don Marro spoke of wanting to have wide broadcast of VVAW goals. He described the 3 linchpins of VVAW (responsible government, responsible ownership, and responsible breeding) as being substantive issues. He said there is also a motivational component that establishment groups are not changing fast enough. Conventional wisdom requires working slowly for “a place at the table”, but Don prefers that VVAW serve as a catalyst for change. This will get done legislatively because there is a need to do it, and there is money to make it happen.

He noted there should be a challenge to someone like Delegate Saxman who described the VVAW initiative to eliminate gas chambers as an unfunded mandate. Saxman should not be given “a pass” on statements that are either deliberately or irresponsibly incorrect.

8. Don spoke of recent meetings.

The meeting with Agriculture Secretary Bloxom was productive and we await follow up from the Secretary to our gas chamber initiative.

The meeting with Paul Goldman of Mayor Wilder's staff Don described as unsatisfactory and Goldman as defeatist. Goldman opined that laws need not be enforced if they cause too much pain.

9. Melissa Klein asked how many inspectors the office of the State Vet has to do the inspections required by law.

Don responded by saying that during a meeting last November with State Vet David Cardin, Cardin said that with three inspectors, each public pound could be inspected twice a year. (Note that this schedule does not include inspection of other than public facilities.)

Don says that schedule is impossible to maintain, even just for pound facilities, considering there will also be follow-up visits required to ensure compliance.

10. Don indicated he was cautiously confident that Secretary Bloxom will take a stand on the elimination of gas chambers, in part because the office of Governor Warner is involved.
11. Don continued that change needs to happen locally. During the 2005 session, it was discovered that the Virginia Association of Counties and the Virginia Municipal League were both unaware of certain funding options.

Don described how the House Ag Subcommittee voted down several VVAW funding initiatives saying there was no local interest, while at the same time the city of Newport News asked for the very same thing as VVAW did as to a higher cap on license fees.

12. John Morris asked about the reaction which should be put forth when VVAW is asked whether it is a no-kill group.

Lillian Clancy said VVAW has not taken a stand; VVAW is not a group that has custody of animals.

John and Melissa Klein suggested that there be a "FAQ" section on the VVAW website to handle questions such as the "no kill" issue.

13. A short discussion followed about activists who do not follow the law. It was said that homeland security listed animal rights groups as the #2 terrorist threat in the US. Mollie McCurdy said that hunting groups try to describe VVAW as radical.

Don said that VVAW works within the system, and what we are doing and saying is available for everyone to see by going to the website.

14. John Morris wondered what ways there might be to work with various opposition groups. He described putting the mission statement of VVAW and of the Hunting Dog Owner's Association side-by-side, and finding little difference between them.

Melissa Klein says no one sees themselves as part of the problem including breeders and hunters.

15. Don asked Chris Harman how he would work to make change.

Chris indicated a willingness to talk with Bob Kane and see how far apart VVAW and his group are.

Dawn Morris suggested going under Kane and into his membership when she heard that VVAW offered to meet with Mr. Kane but that he was "too busy".

16. Chris Harman wondered how to connect with someone who appears to have such a different pattern of behavior. He described someone who has spent a good deal of money on their dog, providing a big and newly built enclosure, but spends no time with the dog.

17. Lillian Clancy suggested that the same problems are repeated and seen over and over, and suggested that letters or calls need to be made on these issues.

18. Melissa Klein suggested that humane education should be a focus, providing a program that builds on skills at the appropriate grade levels, and some might be done by ACOs.

Don responded by saying VVAW should work broadly and not focus on just one thing. One can't always guess right, so a lot of different things justify a broad gauged effort. Virginia needs funding for animal control, needs a mindset change on disposable companion animals through humane education, and needs a change in the birthrate of animals.

19. Mollie McCurdy brought up interaction she had with Delegate Ben Cline, who she said claimed didn't know what he was voting for when he opposed elimination of gas.

Don says it is up to us all to reach the legislators and make sure they understand. Better yet, have the legislative liaisons for the legislators come to VVAW for advice rather than the establishment.

20. Chris Harman talked about replacing a sitting delegate, finding local candidates, and building support for them.

21. There are many animal groups, and it is difficult to bring them together to support a single viewpoint.

22. Lillian Clancy and Don Marro encouraged all to attend as many local meetings as possible so the Boards get to know the VVAW positions. They also encouraged the establishment of a local VVAW group.
23. Don described next steps:

VVAW is planning to become a 501c3, c4, and PAC, and to fund-raise for these entities.

VVAW will meet with legislators, will talk with former patrons, and will get new patrons. There will be as much face time as possible.

VVAW will work both locally and at the legislative level.
24. Joi Brown asked if participants were aware that there were community foundations across the state that could provide contact information about the active groups in their respective areas.
25. Dawn Morris talked of developing a promotional button to encourage interest in VVAW.

She is also working on a power point presentation which can be used in various places to grow membership. She intends to have the presentation ready for a fall launch.

Melissa Klein said such a presentation could be used broadly including with Boards of Supervisors and Chambers of Commerce.

Don added that he would encourage such a presentation to church and education groups to build support from these groups.
26. Don thanked Dawn and John Morris for hosting the meeting and noted that local hosts make successful meetings.
27. Chris Harman wondered why the local SPCA didn't attend the meeting today.
28. Many people indicated they want brochures to distribute. Please let Lillian, Don or Glen know how many and what contact information you prefer.

If you want to print the brochures yourself, Glen will get you the correct file to do that.
29. The group will continue to talk via shared emails after the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 1pm.