**DURHAM COUNTY ANIMAL WELFARE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the Special Meeting of April 27, 2021**

**(In lieu of Regular Meeting)**

**Present:**

*Committee Members:*Jan Paul, Kari Linfors, Brian Mulligan, Joy Nolan, Shannon McCabe

*Non-voting Members:* Commissioner Heidi Carter, Capt. Tim Deck, Capt. Mark Manning, Leah Santelli, Shafonda Davis

*Community Members and Observers:* Rodney Jenkins, Wendy Pinner, Sarah Reichman, John Graves, Sarah McDonald, Susan Teer, Kiki Raynor

Committee Counsel: Willie Darby

**Next Regular Meeting:** Tuesday, May 25, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. – Virtual Meeting

**Item I - Introductory Remarks**

The special meeting was called to order by acting Chair, Capt. Tim Deck. The topic of this second special meeting is the issue of community cat management. The meeting was recorded on GoToMeeting.

It was agreed that this would be a special meeting, in lieu of a regular meeting; therefore, the approval of the minutes, shelter report, animal services report, and other regular business were suspended.

**Item II - Goals and Objectives, Community Cat Control**

Much information has been presented to the Committee on the issue of feral cat management from various sources during the past several meetings. The next step is to identify the direction the Committee wishes to take with respect to policy issues and possible recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners.

The primary goals of the Shelter are (1) less euthanasia and (2) a decrease in the feral cat population in the community. Trapping and euthanasia are not resulting in decreasing either the rate of euthanasia nor the overall number of community cats. The APS Board and shelter staff have great concerns and have discussed the issue, but are not prepared to lead a large feral cat initiative, but will work with a support agency – whether it is an organization or an individual or individuals -- to lead the effort to create and administer a TNR Program and to fine-tune a program to meet the above goals. A suggestion includes having individuals feeding the cats take responsibility by spaying and neutering the animals.

Committee member Mulligan discussed the research on the issue of TNR/TNVR, and observed that it seems that for every pro-TNR positive report, there exists a negative one. Some of the stated reasons for not instituting a TNR program include that they don’t work; the animals are abandoned; feral cats lead a horrible death In order to launch a successful program, there would need to be a concerted public information and public relations campaign to educate the public about the benefits and efficacy of TNR/TNVR programs. Some individuals apparently believe they have the right to allow their cat(s) outdoors at all times; there are regular posts on social media related to people’s cats being trapped, and ignorance of the need for vaccinations.

Committee discussion on these remarks centered on the problems with irresponsible cat owners, the possibility of the county requiring licensing, and the need for ordinance provisions and enforcement regarding nuisance animals.

Animal Welfare Officer Pinner informed the Committee that officers answer multiple calls in the field. Treyburn has a feral cat problem, and the agency receives many trap requests. Neighbors complain about cat allergies, or simply hate cats, and feel they cannot enjoy the property that they own because of the cats. There is another feral cat colony near the elementary school on Snow Hill Road, and people fear contracting rabies, especially given an increase in the number of rabid raccoons in the area. Someone needs to be held responsible.

Capt. Deck acknowledged that there must be sensitivity towards people who don’t want cats on their property, and noted that there had been a rabid raccoon near Little River School. Vaccination of feral cats is necessary to address the public health concerns.

Shelter Director Davis noted that vaccinated community cats are identified by ear-tipping. The public should be aware of the differences between indoor/outdoor cats and feral cats. Vaccination of all cats is a great help, because, as a practical matter, whether or not cats are spayed/neutered or vaccinated, they will still exist in the community. Leah Santelli noted that information needs to be disseminated regarding deterrence other than a trap/euthanize policy. Noise ordinances, recommendations of motion sensors, are among options. The public needs to know that trapped animals get euthanized.

Shannon McCabe spoke about pervasive opinions from various presenters to the effect that when a colony becomes a nuisance or appear in an unacceptable area, relocation is an option. Regardless of the path chose, the trap/euthanize process we have now is not effective.

Jan Paul suggested that the Committee focus on overall goals, such as (1) reducing the community cat population, (2) minimizing the public health risks, (3) seeking human and financial resources to assist the Shelter and Animal Services.

John Graves of Best Friends Animal Society put forth some thoughts on compromise recommendations. There is much to consider with respect to Trap, Neuter/Return. Mr. Graves has a background in Animal Control and has realized over the years that mitigation (dealing with future cats) and deterrence approaches have changed the game. Cats will *be there.* A vaccinated cat in a fight with a rabid raccoon poses less of a public health risk, and it is also less likely that a neutered cat will engage with a rabid raccoon. The community needs to identify resources, particularly with respect to relocation, where the cats will have a caregiver, food, and territory. It is also critical to realize what’s attracting the cats: bird feeders are a “raccoon buffet” and attract other wildlife, both wanted and unwanted. Deterrence measures include such things as sprinkler systems, for example. Communities must have the proper tools to educate and to advance mitigation strategies. Best Friends is willing and able to help. Empirical evidence shows that 80% of owned strayed cats are likely to return home on their own; clearly owners are more satisfied if their cats are trapped, neutered, and returned alive/reunited after being brought to the shelter, instead of being trapped and euthanized, as they are now - feral cats account for 80% of the cats that come into animal shelters . The American Bar Association has backed trap-neuter-vaccinate-return (TNVR) programs for free-roaming cats. The ABA has also approved a resolution that calls for legislation and policies at state and local levels to implement TNVR programs and provides that existing laws and policies should be interpreted to allow the programs.

<https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/trap_neuter_vaccinate_return_community_cats_aba_delegates>

TNR works. Widescale programs are in existence. Mitigation training for Animal Control Officers and guidance and training for the community are important – trained Animal Control Officers can help greatly with public education.

Durham Public Health Director Rodney Jenkins provided thoughts on the public health aspect of free-roaming cats. He acknowledged that TNVR programs are widely accepted throughout the state and are favorable to many locations. Education is key. If the Durham Public Information Office is able to disseminate strong, evidence-based, factual information, the Public Health Department will support such a program. Public Health wants to be of service in such an initiative.

A straw vote was taken of the four voting members present at the end of the meeting. The consensus is that there would be support for a TNVR Program if adequate mitigation and public information initiatives are adopted. The Committee strongly supports the goal of minimizing euthanasia.

Committee Counsel Willie Darby asked that at the next meeting the Committee discuss and crystallize its goals. Attorney Darby will contact Kelsey Gilmore-Futeral of Best Friends Animal Society for information, guidance, and suggestions on revising Durham’s ordinances to allow for the implementation of a TNVR policy. Best Friends has already completed a comprehensive review of Durham’s ordinances and identified barriers to such a policy initiative, and can provide a simple draft ordinance for the Committee’s review that can remove the barriers that exist in our current ordinances. Hannah Houser, Lincoln County Animal Services Director has also performed a review of various ordinances. Currently the three biggest barriers are (1) ownership issues, (2) the requirement for trapping permits; (3) the requirement that all strays be surrendered or trapped be taken to the shelter in lieu of a reporting-only requirement.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Janice Perrin Paul, J.D.

Committee Secretary