

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF COLLIER COUNTY
DOMESTIC ANIMAL SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

Naples, Florida
February 20, 2024

LET IT BE REMEMBERED that the Collier County Domestic Animal Services Advisory Board, in and for the County of Collier, having conducted business herein, met on this date at 4 p.m. for a **WORKSHOP** in Administrative Building F, 3rd Floor, Collier County Government Center, Naples, Florida, with the following members present:

CHAIRMAN: Jim Rich
VICE CHAIR: Meredith McLean
SECRETARY: Sue Law
VACANT
Michele Antonia
Kelly Hyland
Dr. Robert March (excused)
Cpl. Sherry Rego

ALSO PRESENT: Marcy Perry, Director, Domestic Animal Services
Cindy Delgado, Administrative Assistant, DAS
Dan Rodriguez, Deputy County Manager
Tanya Williams, County Public Services Department Head
Jeff Weir, Director, Operations Support, Public Services
Tom Iandimarino, Director, Code Enforcement Division

Any persons in need of the verbatim record of the meeting may request a copy of the audio recording from Domestic Animal Services.

I. Call to Order

Chairman Rich called the meeting to order at 4 p.m. He told attendees that this is a workshop, not a regular meeting and we will not vote or make motions. Workshops focus on a single subject that we strive to get a consensus on, so we can vote on it at our regular meeting.

II. Roll Call – Establish a Quorum

A quorum of six was established.

III. Pledge of Allegiance

[The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.]

IV. Workshop Rules of Engagement

Chairman Rich told the board:

- At the last meeting, he was very embarrassed because we had a very unprofessional meeting.
- There was a lot of finger-pointing, screaming and politicking. That's very unbecoming of any board and he was ashamed but will take full responsibility because he allowed it to happen. It won't happen in the future.
- We should be working together for a common goal and not be at each other's throats, so he hopes everyone acts in a more professional manner in the future.
- Jamie French and Tom Iandimarino, the new Code Enforcement director, had asked this board to delay this workshop until they had time to put their thoughts together because they want to do it right and probably have one chance to get it right.
- They wanted to make a full presentation to the DSAB, at which point we can make our comments, vote and act.
- But some members of the board wanted to contribute. They wanted to have something to say to them and that's why we're having this workshop today.
- He's asked Tanya Williams to take over the meeting.

V. Integrating Animal Control with Code Enforcement

Ms. Williams told the board and audience:

- She's going to turn her back to the majority of the public because she's going to be talking directly with the advisory board.
- She will provide them with information and ask questions, then write down what they have to say.
- What prompted this workshop was the integration of the animal control portion of DAS with our Code Enforcement division, which is a work in progress. We don't have a finalized document, finalized standard operating procedures or a draft.
- Everyone from the County Manager's Office on down through Growth Management and Public Services is trying to get this right before we present it to the advisory board for review and any work that's needed.
- Everything is governed by the state Sunshine Act and will be made available

to the public, so the public will not be shut out of communications on this.

- DAS relies on its partners so we can all be successful for the care and welfare of animals in Collier County.
- She's taking this opportunity to talk to the advisory board about critical concerns or areas we want to address as we work toward next year's budget.
- We're only in the second quarter of the current fiscal year, but we've already started planning for FY25, which runs from October 1 to September 30th.
- She and Marcy are working with the County Manager's Office and the Office of Management & Budget to develop DAS's budget.
- This workshop will end with public comment. Anyone can sign up to speak.

A. What initial questions come to mind?

B. What initial concerns do you have?

C. What ideas do you have to offer?

VI. What Can You/Your Organization Provide as a Resource to Assist DAS in its Mission?

(Board members and others were asked to provide info to DAS or Ms. Williams)

VII. Identify Critical Needs for Consideration-FY2025 Budget Kick-off

[Ms. Williams set up an easel divided into areas of concern and took notes during the workshop.]

Ms. Williams said they'll discuss three categories:

- Board members can ask questions to ensure DAS and Code Enforcement addresses their concerns in this new integration of Animal Control and Code Enforcement.
- We always have time for room for improvement and ways to take a look at how we do things, why we do things, what the ordinance says and what's mandated by the state.
- We're concerned with animals, but nine times out of 10, when we go on property, there also are large-scale code violations occurring that jeopardize the health and safety of animals.
- She will open up the conversation to the board and will write down the concerns in each category.

Chairman Rich said:

- Several months ago, when you first mentioned that Code Enforcement may have played some role in DAS, he made an appointment with Code Enforcement and the County Manager and provided a list of 26 concerns.
- He was told the list was helpful.
- It included what actions Code Enforcement might take and what they'd look at.
- He didn't get a response because they're still working on it.

Ms. Williams suggested they put his concerns on the board and that might spur thoughts from other advisory board members.

Ms. Antonia said she read in the University of Florida report that UF recommended

that DAS keep animal control under DAS, rather than under Code Enforcement. Ms. Perry confirmed that was in the report.

Animal Control should remain under DAS, not under Code Enforcement.

Secretary Law said that would prompt many questions on how they can mesh and work side by side. DAS is capable with the animals, while Code Enforcement could pick up the permits, do inspections, shelter inspections, complaints, citations, paperwork – everything that clogs the DAS system.

[Chairman Rich distributed copies of his list of 26 concerns to advisory board members.]

Cpl. Rego cited some concerns:

- Critical budget needs would be staffing.
- We have about 36 full-time employees. That doesn't include five or six contracted KeyStaff employees. They're in charge of everything from animal care to the clinic to admin to answering phones, appointments, scheduling, payroll, purchasing, adoptions, field operations, intakes and fostering.
- The University of Florida report is from subject-matter experts in animal sheltering. It said we need at least 26 more full-time staff at the time of the report, when there were 314 animals at the shelter.
- When she reads the functions, power and duties of this board, it says we make recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners on programs, services, classes and what will further assist Collier County domestic animals in providing the best possible service to the community.
- Our job also is to analyze and review construction and improvements to domestic animal facilities and to make recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners regarding those facilities. How often do we do that? Not since she's been on the board.
- These are things we need to start taking care of. They're critical budget needs.
- DAS needs staff. It doesn't have enough people to take care of these animals. That doesn't count amount of volunteers, about 286 volunteers, including 20-30 who come daily.
- If we really care about these animals, why aren't we going to the county commissioners and talking about the budget and grants we could get? We have grant writers who could get certain things done, like 26 more employees.
- She walks around DAS, talks to staff and volunteers, and although they're amazing, it's not enough.
- As a board, we should be looking into how to help them with their budget.
- If Code Enforcement takes this over, releasing DAS from enforcement, do animal control officers (ACOs) move under Code Enforcement?
- Enforcement is not what we're up here to do, but since she's been on the board, that's been the main focus. What she's read is we're here to help DAS.
- Why are we discussing Code Enforcement now if it's not finalized?
- We need to be taking care of what we need to do to serve domestic animals. We're falling short.
- We have 26 staff who need to clean and feed. Eight are staff members and four are KeyStaff, so four have to answer the phones after a certain time.

- We need to go to the county commissioners and say, What do we need to do to get more job placements here? Are there grants that we can use?

Chairman Rich responded:

- We did this several years ago. The board would come up with ideas to assist DAS and we'd get together with the director to put them on a list and prioritize.
- Every time we got together, we'd see which were done or not done and which needed to be worked on.
- That's what he was going to ask the board to do tonight, put a list together that we could discuss at the next meeting and work with Marcy to see what's practical, which would work, and can we take on these projects ourselves? Do we need the county for assistance?
- We haven't done any of that.

Cpl. Rego agreed and responded:

- This is a great board, but we're battling against ourselves, domestic animals and Marcy. We can't do that. We need to work together as a team. We will be amazing if we can get things done.
- Lately, we're spinning our wheels doing absolutely nothing. We need to put our heads together.
- She looks at things from a law enforcement angle.
- UF is telling us we need staff.
- DAS had over 500 animals not long ago and had to place them elsewhere.
- We need to help domestic animals daily and need staff to get the job done.
- We've gotten on to several properties because of code violations, so we need to work together as a team.
- In her area, the Estates, we work very well beside our Code Enforcement officers. They help us be able to lawfully get on properties with animal issues.
- She's tired of feeling like she's doing absolutely nothing to assist.

Chairman Rich said in addition to extra personnel, we need higher management. Marcy needs direct assistance when she's unavailable. She tried to take a vacation for three days. She's always living at DAS.

Chairman Rich said:

- We don't have a shelter manager now and we had an incident. Who's supervising that person? No one. We need someone if Marcy goes out of town.
- We need a high-volume spay-neuter vet to keep up. We've got a new vet who takes care of animals on a daily basis.
- We have a problem with feral cats and community cats. We need to find a partner or someone who can take care of them.
- There are fewer and fewer vets who want to work with shelters. The ones who do charge prices that aren't affordable.
- We need to find someone who can do large volume spay and neuter.

Cpl. Rego suggested finding grants.

Chairman Rich outlined his list:

- We need a grant writer, but even if we have a grant for it, we need to find someone who will do high-volume spay and neuter.
- We need trained, qualified volunteers to follow up on adoptions.
- We need volunteers who can follow up on issues, such as someone who dumped a dog to see how the animal is doing; whether they have any other pets; how are they getting along together; what they're feeding them; are they going outside; are they getting along with other family members?
- We used to do this when we did adoptions. About 10-15% of animals were returned because people are afraid or don't know they can call to get answers.
- By having someone who can give them answers, it will prevent many animals from being returned to the shelter.
- We need a marketing campaign to promote positive aspects of DAS. They can say we've saved so many lives because of our no-kill philosophy, we've done X amount of adoptions and X number of unnecessary births have been prevented through our spay and neuter program.
- We're one of the few county shelters in the state that has an open door policy.
- We have phenomenal volunteers, but volunteers typically like to do what they like, and there are few volunteers who want to do anything you want. Most are happy doing what they're comfortable with.
- You could train willing volunteers to speak at condo associations, HOA groups, trailer parks and apartment buildings about the benefits of allowing animals. Apartments and condos that allow pets can command higher rents and selling prices.
- He told that to the Naples Area Board of Realtors and a few thought it was a good idea. It's a tough sell, but the more educated they are, the better it is.
- We can speak at schools to educate children about animal care. That's a new generation, Brownies and Cub Scout Troops.
- We could visit retirement communities and assisted-living residences that allow pets to suggest older animals for potential adoptions. We've done it in the past and adopted out many older animals.
- We could purchase a take-a-number system for the lines in the DAS lobby. He found one at a great price yesterday on sale, \$200. It was \$380. [He provided it to Ms. Williams.] Sometimes lines are confusing to people.
- We could create scripts for answering DAS phones to answer the most common questions, such as: Can I surrender my pets or I just found an injured cat or dog, what should I do? I just picked up a stray animal, can you send someone out to pick it up? Do you have a clinic that could spay?
- Often, whoever answers doesn't have the correct answer and that's a poor reflection on DAS.
- You could say, "Just a minute. I have a manual and can give you that answer."

Cpl. Rego suggested a recorded line where a caller can press a number for the answer to their question.

Secretary Law noted that DAS changed the answering system, but it takes too long.

Secretary Law said:

- We need to take care of DAS employees because of the stress levels. They've got 20 people in front of them who are all passionate about picking up their dog, adopting a dog or they've lost a dog. Everybody is impatient and they're breathing down each other's necks and the phones don't get answered because the line would go crazy if they stopped to answer it.
- She's been at DAS many times, thinking the phones were broken, but saw 30 people in line waiting. That's a weak spot.
- If they can take a number, sit down, have the paperwork near them that they need to fill out, whether it's adoption, surrendering, etc., they could get it done before they get up to the DAS desk employee. That way, the employee can stop and answer the phone and tell the person, "I'll be with you in a minute."

Vice Chair McLean said there's a shelter in Houston that takes in about 30,000 animals a year and they have an electronic system like that, so that's an option. It divvies everything into different areas. She can send that to DAS to look at.

Secretary Law said The Benny Fund (www.thebennyfund.org) donated money for the shelter yards and is awaiting the approval of a request to donate more funds to fix some low ground areas due to rain.

Ms. Williams said she intended to rewrite that Executive Summary this morning because now that they're funding in its entirety, it will be a very quick path forward. She plans to finish that Executive Summary within the next 24 hours.

Vice Chair McLean said:

- If DAS goes under Code Enforcement or becomes two separate entities, they need to follow best practices for education and professional development.
- If Code Enforcement takes over, we're dealing with living beings and the University of Florida, HS and the U.S. ASPCA all have best practices for progressive education and training to prevent animals from coming to the shelter and to ensure people follow the rules.
- That should be put into the budget needs, including allowing staff to attend training so they have the best standard practices across the board, whether it's Code Enforcement or DAS. It's critical and important.

A discussion ensued and the following points were made:

- Secretary Law said we initially talked about getting the word out to people about what DAS is. They have no clue who to call.
- For the bilingual communities, it needs to start at home, the Brownie and Boy Scout meetings, so the kids take it home to their parents.
- We also could install signs in buses, such as if you lost a dog, call DAS, and to explain what DAS is.
- Vice Chair McLean said DAS needs better marketing.
- Secretary Law said Marcy once went to the county commissioners to get more money for DAS, but it was a bad time and our money got cut.

Ms. Williams explained:

- That's why we're starting now.

- he Board of County Commissioners has tasked the county with doing two things differently this next budget year.
- We're looking at priority-based budgeting, which means that each DAS program is clearly identified, with an explanation of what the program is and the cost. It's then put in a ranking system software program that we're going to be using.
- When we go to the BCC to review our budgets and budget proposals, they're going to see very clearly what the programs are within DAS, what the cost is to the general fund and the impact it has on the community and DAS's mission.
- The other thing we're doing differently this year is we usually don't set budget policy for another eight to 12 weeks. We already kicked that discussion off with them in early February, so staff is getting marching orders sooner than before and that gives us an opportunity to start talking with commissioners about budgetary needs.
- It opened up that dialogue a lot sooner.
- Those are two things working in our favor, moving forward into 2025, which begins October 1.

Chairman Rich asked if we can show compatibilities between other shelters, such as Lee County or Miami-Dade, show what their staffing and budgets are, etc.?

Ms. Williams responded:

- We do that. As part of the budget process, we generally look at five sister counties, Lee, Charlotte, Sarasota, Manatee and Martin counties. The reason it's those five counties is that the makeup, the population numbers and other characteristics are similar to Collier County.
- We tend to be a rather affluent county. We like to see what Orange County is doing, as well as Palm Beach County and Miami-Dade, so we expand that to look at those.
- If you're aware of other counties, municipalities or shelters that are comparable to our makeup or have a great program that you feel would benefit Collier County, we would welcome that data so we can do those comparisons.
- That's a standard practice, not so much prior to her tenure, but she believes in data analysis. We need to benchmark ourselves against other counties and other shelters to see where we're at, not just any random shelter, but the stellar shelters.

Secretary Law asked if any of those shelters have joined with Code Enforcement like we're considering.

Ms. Williams said she wasn't certain, but it does occur at many shelters. We wouldn't be the first.

Ms. Hyland said:

- She has questions that relate more to what goes on out in the field.
- The board's responsibilities are services. When it says services, she considers enforcement part of the service DAS provides. We've always worked on enforcement, ever since she's been here, 2004.

- Commissioners directed us to work on enforcement, revise and help with ordinances and that's what we've done.
- She was part of the group that got the anti-chaining ordinance passed.
- There also was an incident with Perkins, a backyard breeder, years ago.
- The board and volunteers always have been involved in enforcement.
- What happens out in the community is what causes animals to be in the shelter.
- We need more staff inside and outside the shelter and in the field. Many animals need assistance in the community and there are a lot of cases occurring that aren't being vetted countywide.
- How would a merger with Code Enforcement work? What would Code Enforcement be able to do that DAS cannot presently do? How would they assist each other and work together?
- Who will be paying the ACOs if this happens and it's integrated? If someone else is paying them, not DAS, then where is that budget money going? That would be coming to DAS to be able to keep them on the DAS payroll.
- If Code Enforcement takes over, then who would be taking strays, who would be out in the field doing that and assisting? Who would the public call for assistance?
- We have the CCSO, the Animal Cruelty Task Force, DAS and ACOs and we would have Code Enforcement.
- What would the process be for calling and getting help out in the field? Who's going to show up? Who's going to do what, how, where and when?
- If we have a case of a chained dog or problems on property with improper kennel sizes, who's going to go out and assist? Who will do what?
- Will Code Enforcement be able to take or confiscate dogs? Are they going to call DAS or would they have the authority to help and assist an animal?
- Who will be responsible for inspecting breeders for compliance? When they get a permit, they agree DAS can go into their home for an inspection to ensure they're complying.
- Who will be responsible for inspecting pet stores? We will soon have two, maybe three.
- When she sent her agenda item in, she wanted to discuss the ordinance that we worked on, that the commissioners told us they wanted us to work on, to put more teeth into the ordinance.
- She thought the ordinance would be changed to help out in the field.
- As the ordinance stands now, that pet store would not be in compliance from the day it opened. That hasn't been taken care of, so who will ensure it's in compliance?
- Who's going to handle issues when you have backyard breeders or regular breeders that have issues, such as parvo or other diseases and children are running around in the backyard.
- She once went to Immokalee and puppies were dying in her hands.
- With multiple people involved with divisions, who's going to go out there to protect the children countywide?
- Who will be responsible for writing the procedures and policies if there's an integration and who will be held accountable when things are not going the way they should be going?

- How will Code Enforcement officers and ACOs get on the same page when they go out on calls and assist?
- Who will make sure it's followed up in court? If it's dismissed, why is it dismissed? Use that case as a case study to figure out why it happened and how to have a better outcome.
- Learning from past experiences and cases will help things improve in the community. We need to learn from examples.
- In the past two years, many cases were dismissed and we need to find out why. (This was explained in a prior meeting and has been corrected, resulting in a 100% conviction rate.)
- *We need to educate the community and people should be held accountable and there should be consequences.*
- She gets frustrated seeing what's going on out in the field and it's not corrected. The animals really need the help in the community. They deserve help and the assistance, which is DAS's responsibility.
- We wouldn't have so many animals in the shelter, if there was better control in the field.
- She's not trying to bring up the same issues, but the same issues keep happening.

Chairman Rich noted that many of the things she mentioned are on his list and he agrees. It's a matter of the enforceability, who is responsible for it and what legally can be done. That's what he's fighting all the time. He gets a lot of backlash here, but there are very few people who care about animals as much as he does.

Secretary Law asked who told the board at the last meeting that DAS' conviction rate for the past year in front of the special magistrate was 100%.

Chairman Rich said it was Jamie French.

A discussion ensued and the following points were made:

- *We have to look at the ordinances. If you don't like what the ordinance is, we need to look at how we can rewrite it.*
- *The chair wanted one enacted to ensure people turn in an animal within 24 hours to DAS. People can't hold on to animals.*
- We tweaked the ordinances to give them teeth and they were supposed to go to the commissioners, but that didn't happen.
- Ms. Williams noted that Florida statutes govern everyone in the state and there are limitations with local ordinances. Ordinances can be changed by the Board of County Commissioners.
- Some ordinances cannot be more restrictive than Florida statutes but it depends on the subject matter.
- Florida statutes are explicit concerning animal welfare, cruelty and neglect. We always start with Florida statutes first and then move to our ordinances, Chapter 14. She noted that pot-bellied pigs aren't allowed, except for a four-to five-month period when they're raised on agricultural land by the 4-H for the fair.
- Secretary Law said people aren't scared of ordinances because they don't think what's in them is against the law.
- What more can we do to enforce the law/ordinances except fine and lien

them?

- Ms. Williams noted that animals are property, according to the state, and the county says we have to abide by that definition and those legal guidelines governing the possession of property. Her cat Romeo is no different than her Jeep Wrangler. She's not sure that definition can change on the county level.
- Chairman Rich said California was trying to change that.
- He noted that federal law trumps ordinances and that's what gets us when we go onto people's property.
- Ms. Hyland said the way she reads it is you're allowed on the property, the curtilage, with just cause but are not allowed in any building within that curtilage, meaning a residence, a home, a barn or garage. You're allowed to walk around the outside of the property but can't go inside.
- Chairman Rich said the curtilage is considered part of their property, the outbuildings.
- Cpl. Rego said if somebody comes on her property and removed her dog, it's no different than if they came on her property and removed her vehicle. You'll go to jail.
- If you see a dog that's injured, yelping and needs assistance, you could respond, unless there's a gate or fenced area. She'd have to knock on the door.
- She can't walk around to the back unless she has a reason to be there. You can't walk around people's properties. She needs permission. She'd also have to hear and see the cruelty herself.
- Ms. Hyland asked if she could go to a neighbor's property to get a view.

Ms. Williams told the board:

- We want to be very careful here. We don't want to venture into that conversation. We can revisit this later with Code Enforcement, so the CCSO and Code Enforcement can discuss it.
- We can best articulate that with case studies and after-action reports – what works, what doesn't and why.
- *We need to educate the public and the various entities we work with about what we legally can do and how that plays out in various scenarios.*
- We should table that discussion for the future and she made a note to revisit the ordinance revisions that were recommended. She'd also like to revisit those with Code Enforcement to get their observations on what's recommended.
- What happens on properties can be a force multiplier. We have another area of expertise that's going to be actively working with this on this. She'd like to get their expertise and perspectives.
- We can table it and discuss it later to educate the board and the public.

Vice Chair McLean said we need to ramp up shelter intervention programs. They're key to keeping animals out of the shelter if Code Enforcement is out seeing violations. They can provide resources to people so if they're fined, they could be getting help. We need to educate and enforce, but it's generally somebody in crisis who doesn't have the finances, etc. We need to ensure we incorporate more of those as we expand programs to ensure fewer animals come in.

A discussion ensued and the following points were made:

- Chairman Rich noted that people are buying food for dogs yet they can't afford to feed them or afford to medically take care of them. *We could have an emergency budget for situations like that to help those people.*
- Secretary Law said she and Marcy talked about a program she was studying through the Best Friend Society, or something like that, about *making ACOs more user-friendly, more friendly to the public so that if they saw a dog out and knew where it belonged, they could put them back in and close the gate. They could give animal owners a voucher and tell them to come in and take care of whatever was needed, like a free clinic.*
- Vice Chair McLean said *the forefront of animal sheltering is not kennels, it's outreach and talking to people.* ACOs aren't scary, they're there to help people and are more likely to explain what's going on. They can have conversations and offer programs.

Ms. Antonia told the board:

- We talked about going into schools and educating children, but *we also need to educate the adults* and there are many ways we can do that.
- *There's the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, which has meetings all the time. We could speak at one of those meetings.*
- *We also need to educate people in the language that they speak so they understand what you're saying.* It's not just Spanish and Creole. There are many other dialects.
- You can't expect someone to follow an ordinance if they don't know what the ordinance is or they don't understand.
- *We need to enforce breeder's permits.* There are many litters during season in Immokalee and none of these people have a breeder's permit. Should they all have a breeder's permit? No, because they don't understand what the ordinance is.
- *They need to have their animal spayed or neutered and owners need to understand the consequences of having all these kittens.*
- There has to be education to explain what resources we can provide for them to spay and neuter, so that that this won't happen.

Vice Chair McLean asked if they could *add a bilingual staffer.*

Chairman Rich asked whether the school board would allow them to *discuss reproduction or about spay and neuter in the schools.*

Ms. Antonia said she's worked in adult education for 25-30 years and has always discussed that. Adult ed is another resource. When she was the coordinator for the adult programs at night, we had 200-300 adult students at night. Can you imagine the impact you could have if you could talk to them about the ordinances and what to do if you want a dog spayed or neutered and who can help you do that?

Chairman Rich said that beyond the ordinance is what *the ramifications are if they don't spay and neuter their dogs and cats.* We tried to educate kids at a school on Marco Island but the principal said we can't discuss reproduction because some people don't believe in it.

A discussion ensued and the following points were made:

- There's more leeway with adult ed.
- *You can reach kids through Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, the Boys & Girls Club and other groups.*
- If there is a voucher program, we need to consider that some *people in Immokalee don't have transportation and wouldn't be able to get the animal spayed or neutered.*
- *Is there some way we could work with them to bring dogs back?* Many love their animals but can't get to DAS. Can't ACOs or a volunteer bring them back?
- Ms. Perry said DAS does that on a case-by-case basis.
- We started doing foster to adopt to try and lower our population. Some of those folks don't have transportation to bring the cat or dog back for surgery, so officers assist.
- Secretary Law said *we could get a list of volunteers to do that. She'd be glad to help.*
- Vice Chair McLean asked if they'd thought of using volunteers in different capacities. *Pasco County volunteers take the aggressive driving/dangerous driving/safe-driving course and they allow volunteers to drive ACOs so the ACOs can write reports while they're driving to the next call. They almost triple their numbers of calls in a day.*
- *Vice Chair McLean said Pasco County allows volunteers to pick up the strays and fill out reports.* They're not writing code violations, just stray animals. It saves ACOs a lot of time. (She will check to make sure it's a Pasco County program.)

Ms. Williams explained the hiring process:

- Staff hiring is a coordinated effort between Human Resources and DAS.
- The position is posted, applicants fill out an application, provide a resume (if they want), and any other supplemental documentation. Applications are received and reviewed by the Human Resources Division.
- Anyone who meets minimum qualifications is referred to the hiring manager, which for DAS is Marcy and her team. Interviews are set up and conducted. We prefer in-person interviews but many start with a phone interview and end up with an in-person interview. It depends on the number of applicants and the type of position.
- A hiring panel, which has a minimum of two people or as many as four, interviews applicants. Marcy then works with the hiring manager and a selection is made. The division can only make recommendations for a hire but cannot directly hire anyone. The Human Resources Division is responsible for the hiring of everyone who works for the county.
- Marcy makes a recommendation to Human Resources, which then takes the name and does a background check, a routine FDLE background check. Human Resources also checks an applicant's prior jobs and references.
- The applicant is brought in for fingerprinting and a conditional hire.
- Then they're put through drug testing and if everything comes back clear, an offer letter is extended.

Ms. Hyland asked what happens if someone is hired and there's a problem.

There's information all over Facebook and she wanted to know what was happening.

Ms. Williams responded:

- The employee she's asking about is being checked just like any employee.
- Until we talk with volunteers, KeyStaff and that employee, HR will work with Marcy to interview everyone involved.
- When the facts are determined, then corrective action will be taken or we will address the concerns brought to light through social media, emails, etc.
- Human Resources and Marcy must work through our investigative process with any employee if questions are brought forward.
- That is our process. If you have further questions, you can contact HR.

Cpl. Rego told the board:

- When people are on social media, be careful what you're posting. You can drive by a house and think a dog is being abused or is suffering from malnutrition, etc. People are blasting it all over social media. We've got hundreds of comments that say we're going to this house, we're going to take this dog, etc. You're going to get somebody hurt.
- You don't know what this person is going through. This is a law enforcement/domestic animal issue and if we see it, we need to report that to DAS if they need law enforcement to go out there.
- With a lot of these posts, we had somebody who was getting threatened. People were showing up at their house non-stop. Somebody's going to get hurt.
- You don't know what each other is going through so we need to be careful when we're putting information out there because you could have somebody who is spending hundreds and thousands of dollars to take care of that dog.
- She had one that was 18 years old and had constant vet care but she looked like skin and bones and her hair was falling out because she was going through cancer treatments. We have to be careful because if people start threatening, they're going to come out ...
- She agrees many people can't afford their dogs. They love them. That's their family. We don't know what they're going through.
- She reached out to Marcy and Meredith yesterday and they helped tremendously with the situation.
- It's DAS's job to take care of this and law enforcement may need to step in.
- We had an incident and by the time an officer got there, over a half-dozen people had shown up at this person's house, threatening them, etc. They don't realize that there are other people coming out there and they got threatened.
- We don't want that. We don't want our DAS officers going out and getting hurt so we need to reach out to DAS first.
- When she was informed about it, she told the person who told her that "We've got this. It's a case we've been working on and we've worked with these people for a long time." It's in its own driveway. The owner was by the house. She immediately called the owner, who said her soon to be ex-husband is out there. We need to be careful. We don't know what these

people are going through.

- It involved a 16-year-old dog. Law enforcement had all their vet records from when we got the first call.
- It can get out of control and people can get hurt by social media posts.
- We need to be respectful and communicate.

VIII. Public Comment

Susie Mehas, of the Naples Cat Alliance, told the board:

- She's a Realtor but has rescued cats and kittens for over 50 years, starting when she was 8.
- The board has her unwavering support. She loved hearing the information tonight.
- You have wonderful videos and marketing for dogs on social media but need to do that for the cats. Whoever is doing the videos with music is wonderful.
- DAS needs to think about rebranding. Your logo isn't very pretty. Nobody knows what Domestic Animal Services is. It sounds like cows, pigs, chickens, roosters and horses. Is a rooster a domestic animal? She thought it was a farm animal.
- Does the word "services" mean she can call and ask to bring her cat in to have her claws cut? You need to rebrand.
- Did you know Blue Pearl (formerly ASH) closed its doors? Where are those veterinarians, vet techs and staff? Dr. Michael Havig was the main vet. His sister is a co-owner of Wholesome Hound, so you can ask her. Where did all their supplies and equipment go? That was a big place.
- We have officers in Immokalee and Golden Gate Estates now, but it's out of control.
- Will DAS ever get to its expansion? She heard the money was in place so she hopes it happens soon.
- She'd love to see a sanctuary for feral cats so they can live somewhere and be cared for. Some of us with colonies are at the point where the cats are getting older and they can't live there anymore. The conditions are horrible.
- She noticed an event on social media at the fairgrounds and told Marcy it would be great if DAS had a table there, but two days' notice was too difficult for her to get anything together. Is there a social calendar for the county and the Sheriff's Office because anywhere they have an event, DAS also could set up something or disseminate information through flyers in many languages. Michele can help you with that.
- That would be a great venue for promoting DAS.
- The incident you mentioned earlier with an employee has definitely been noticed. That is wrong. That person needs to be moved. She doesn't care what they're doing, cleaning up poop, washing walls or windows, but get them away from the animals or the kids.

Maggie Kemp told the board:

- She thanked Humane Society Naples for the tremendous amount of animals they rescued from DAS and provided with medical care. They could have had different outcomes.
- She's concerned about Code Enforcement taking over, especially when it pertains to community cats and the Community Cat Program.

- What is the criteria for releasing a community cat? Is it anywhere or are they returned to where they were trapped/picked up?
- Can you identify a caretaker/caretakers that the cat will be returned to?
- What is the youngest age of a kitten/cat in the program that's eligible for the program and what is the reasoning behind it? Three-month-old cats shouldn't be part of it.
- What is the oldest age for a community cat? What is the reasoning?
- Is there a team, committee or one person who selects cats to be community cats? What is their experience with TNR (trap, neuter and release)?
- What qualifications or credentials do they possess to make this decision? When is the evaluation done? Is it done immediately when they walk into shelter and they're overwhelmed, or are they given a chance to decompress?
- Where is the evaluation done? Is it up front where it's chaotic with barking dogs, people coming in and out or is it done in the back?
- What is the turn-around from when a kitten/cat is brought in to when it's released or returned?
- How do community cats come into the shelter? What is the percentage that are trapped and brought in?
- What percentage is brought in by the public and what percentage is picked up by an ACO at the request of the public?
- That might be a great way to get some of the Immokalee dogs back to their owners because you seem to be constantly putting cats back out in Immokalee to places where they aren't necessarily wanted. She can back that up.
- What questions are asked to verify the location by the public, if it's actually the location where the cat came from, or if the owner/finder just doesn't want the animal back?
- If an ACO picks up the cat from the public, what questions are asked to confirm they want the cat back and they agreed to take care of it? What if they refuse? Where is this documented?
- What treatment do community cats receive upon entering DAS? Are they tested? Are they dewormed? Are they examined for eye or ear infections? Who does the evaluation?
- Is there a second evaluation or second opinion done? Does the ACO have the authority to override the release for a valid reason or a questionable safety location? You don't put them back in Pelican Bay. You're putting them back in Immokalee, where they're not wanted. Michele can back that up.
- Who has the authority to remove a cat from the Community Cat Program?

Chairman Rich asked if she could e-mail him those questions and he'll call her. He can answer about half and he has questions on about 30% of them, which he's working on now. For the Love of Cats has a full-time employee who does nothing but go out, trap cats and work with community cats, so he has first-hand knowledge.

DAS volunteer Laurie Harris, of Marco Island, told the board:

- You said this board is not responsible for enforcement, but the ordinance says this board is responsible for programs, events, construction, etc. One of the programs is enforcement. The 2024 budget shows enforcement listed under programs, so the board is responsible for enforcement.
- This is an ordinance review year. It says that every four years you review the

ordinances, come up with changes, make recommendations and present them to the Board of County Commissioners.

- Maybe it's time we get together and determine if enforcement is under the purview of this board and if the answer to that is no or maybe you don't want it. But then get it out of programs and move it to Code Enforcement or the Sheriff's Office. Have the ACOs be employees of the Sheriff's Office and get it out of DAS or get it off this board.
- It's the first time she's heard it's not under the board's purview.
- She loves the idea of the rebranding because nobody knows what DAS is. She tells people to go to the county shelter and they think it's on Airport-Pulling Road. We need to rebrand and educate.
- What do you do with the people who don't give a damn about the ordinance?
- Educating them is great and getting people out there with food banks and vet care for dogs is great, but what about the people who don't care and you have multiple calls to the same house and you've got backyard breeding and dogs who are dying? Education is not on their radar.
- If you can't go on property as an officer, unless you've been called and you absolutely know there is a distressed animal, how does an ACO ever go on property? They can't carry a firearm, they can't enforce any laws, so why are there ACOs? Are they just there to review documents and turn them over to the Sheriff's Office?
- If it's their job to be an officer for the county and they have no enforcement capability, then a deputy also has to go on property and you now have two employees there for the same purpose. If you're talking about budgetary items, you've got two people on property for the same reason. One can't do anything but the other can so why is the first one there?
- Years ago, jail inmates used to come every morning and they'd be out of DAS by 10, when it opened. Opening time has been moved to 11 a.m. The prisoners used to be there Monday through Friday, cleaning kennels so when volunteers arrived at 10 a.m., dogs already had been taken out of their kennels and the kennels were cleaned.
- When volunteers arrive at 10 or 11 a.m., the dogs are raging to get out of their kennels. It's not good to have an 80-pound dog locked up that long.
- God forbid it's a Friday morning because now we're closed on Thursdays, so if DAS is closed all day on Thursdays, the last time the dogs got out was 6 p.m. Wednesday and they don't get out again until 11 a.m. Friday morning. Do you know what it's like to get a raging 80-pound pitbull out of a cage? All he wants to do is go potty.
- She understands there's a program now that allows certain volunteers to go to DAS between certain hours Thursday from 1-4 p.m.. She just doesn't understand why it's closed and why it doesn't open now until 11 a.m.
- Why can't volunteers show up at 9 a.m.? We are not supervised but we go through a training program. Why can't we go there and walk the dogs?
- They get aggression issues because they're locked up 23½ hours a day.
- We have 60 dogs to walk and we get 15 minutes per dog twice a day, a half-hour. Why aren't prisoners going in there?
- Why don't we have a Do Not Adopt Registry? It should be countywide. Every county should be talking to each other. We've got people going to other counties to adopt dogs because Collier County wouldn't let them adopt.

- She'd be interested in returning dogs to homes. She and her husband, Randy, take the van with dogs to get spayed and neutered.

Ms. Williams said what she's hearing from Mrs. Harris is that DAS volunteers don't know the "why" behind the changes that occurred. She needs them to be on the same page as DAS and understand, whether it's staff, volunteers or the community. We need better communication.

Ms. Hyland asked if those questions could be answered now.

Ms. Williams said DAS is closed on Thursdays due to staffing. There was an email sent out to volunteers about cleaning and working on Thursdays and Marcy got little to no response.

Ms. Perry told the board:

- That's correct. Grace sends out communication, and she explained the "why" and then got several volunteer emails back and explained why again.
- She put out another request for volunteers to sign up to help clean and feed, and we received pretty much 0 volunteers who were interested.
- We received one later that was the result of us asking volunteers for assistance with cleaning, feeding, doing extras on Thursdays.
- We're trying to get ahead with staffing, booster vaccines, etc., and putting processes in place.
- We're currently doing some small play groups on Thursdays with some select volunteers who are very experienced in the playgroup arena after attending Dogs Playing For Life, so we're looking to expand that.

Ms. Hyland asked why volunteers can't go in to take the dogs out and to let them run versus just cleaning and doing the cleaning and feeding.

Ms. Williams said that's a disconnect and that's for a larger conversation.

Ms. Perry said we've answered that question. We have opened it up for play groups. We're also focusing on cleaning and feeding. We can look to expand later. Right now, our focus is the play groups, which started about two or three weeks ago. That's new for Thursdays, as well as cleaning, feeding and booster shots. We weren't keeping up with that. We're also trying to make that a priority.

Ms. Hyland apologized for asking the same questions but said she's not getting the answers. Why are volunteers not allowed to go in on Thursday not just to clean and feed, but to exercise animals?

Ms. Perry said she doesn't know how many more times they can explain it. We could talk again offline. Certain volunteers are allowed to come in to do play groups, taking dogs out into the play yard and letting them run and play. It doesn't mean we can't expand later. If a volunteer wants to come and do a play group, take a dog out, stretch his legs and play, they can reach out to Grace. She'll connect them with the Dogs Playing for Life volunteers who attended that course.

Ms. Hyland said the volunteers are saying they weren't allowed to come on Thursdays.

Chairman Rich said they need to talk directly to Marcy and get a full explanation. Have they asked recently whether they can join the playgroup and help with the

animals?

Ms. Antonia noted that it's limited to volunteers with more experience.

Ms. Perry said she'll send the board the e-mail that were sent to all the volunteers when this first started. Grace sent multiple emails.

Chairman Rich asked if the Thursday group was limited to volunteers who have more dog experience or is it any volunteer?

Ms. Perry said it's now limited to volunteers with more experience, the ones who learned Dogs Playing for Life. We have to ensure we're not having dog fights and other issues in the yard with volunteers who have not attended Dogs Playing for Life or are not working directly with more experienced volunteers.

Chairman Rich said hopefully that answers the question.

Volunteer Laurie Harris said the first e-mail that went out was to clean and you had to arrive by 9 a.m. and she can't get there then, but could be there from 2-6 p.m. The playgroups are from 1-4 p.m., so she will be going to assist and to get training on playgroups. Our question is why can't volunteers be there on Thursday from 11-6 to just walk the dogs that are not in the playgroup? We do that every day.

Ms. Perry said we are looking to expand in the future, just as we've just expanded to playgroups. This is a new process for us. We're trying to focus on areas we need to focus on for improvement. It's not saying that won't happen in the future. Playgroups have just been opened up. We're trying to work through that first and then we can look at other avenues. We have not opened up playgroups 100% at this moment.

Secretary Law recalled that Thursday is the day the vet can have unlimited access to all of the dogs to get caught up on booster shots, vaccines and everything that needs to be done. If a dog is out playing, that prevents her from doing that.

Ms. Perry said we have needles and syringes and other things we're doing in those buildings that we can't do when it's opened up to volunteers because we can't leave certain vaccines and other things unattended.

Secretary Law asked if that's why you're trying to keep the public out, by closing the gate, so every time a volunteer comes, you've got to open the gate for a volunteer and then close it again for the public?

Ms. Perry said that's correct. That's why we've structured the times because we can't have an employee standing at the gate waiting for volunteers to come in. That's why Grace sent the e-mail with certain times. In the past, we weren't allowing volunteers on holidays, so we are expanding. She's asking for everyone's patience as we continue to expand and look for different ways to incorporate it into the system.

Vice Chair McLean said that cats also need the enrichments. Can you please add that we need to consider opening more volunteer hours and responsibilities? From an animal welfare perspective, she understands the work that must be done, but dogs not being let out more than once a day is tough on them, and cats also need to get petted.

A discussion ensued and the following points were made:

- We need more staffing.
- There's no reason volunteers can't be there if staff is there.

- Maybe they can consider shifts and open the gate at certain times on Thursdays.

Tom Kepp, of SNIP Collier, told the board:

- No one from this board has been before the BCC to speak for DASAB.
- This advisory board helped rewrite the ordinances over the years.
- Enforcement has always been a responsibility.
- When we did the pet store commission meeting, Commissioner Bill McDaniel said it verbatim, that enforcement was a program.
- Commissioner McDaniel wanted to put teeth into the ordinances for hobby breeders.
- They voted on it and it's been under this board's purview.
- SNIP Collier has brought in 40-60 strays yearly for the past five years, and we brought in 130-150 puppies and their moms. We put them in foster homes.
- Yesterday, he went to Immokalee, picked up a dog, brought her to our clinic, got her fixed and took her back at 6 a.m. today.
- We're doing a lot of these ideas, but unfortunately, he doesn't sit on the board.
- He believes he can provide the board with a lot of history because he's been trying to fix the problems for years and is out in the field.
- We work with the Beta Club in Immokalee, where it's terrible for cats.
- That industrial area across from the Humane Society also is filled with cats.
- Every place is full of cats. We have to work together to get that fixed.

Ms. Mehas noted that she's been working for years to fix that industrial area.

Chairman Rich responded:

- Last year, he let Tom speak and Tom bashed him personally.
- He used to consider Tom a friend and a few days ago, praised all the work Tom does in Immokalee, giving him credit for that and sending people to the SNIP clinic.
- Although we disagree, he (Rich) never gets in someone's face in public or bashes people.
- My organization, For the Love of Cats, also does work for cats and you act like you're the only person in the world that does anything for this county.
- It's wrong for you to get up here and insinuate anything like that.
- You were on this board for four years and the same things that you're upset about now, enforcement, you had the ability to do something about it then, but you didn't.
- He doesn't remember anyone ever sitting in the audience and pointing a finger and telling you what a lousy job you did. And yet now that we're on the board, you tell us what a lousy job we're doing.

[Mr. Kepp said he was removed from the board due to his relationship with then DAS Director Amanda Townsend.]

Chairman Rich continued:

- The board doesn't need this. He's trying to get the board to work together.
- He thanks him for his comments. We don't always agree, nor should we but we're all here because we care and we're passionate about we're doing.

- He'd like to make a greater effort to work together.
- When he feels he doesn't deserve to be on this board, he hopes we can work together, have better meetings and accomplish something.

Ms. Mehas said everyone on the board does a great job. She's been involved in animal rescue for a long time and has known Michele, Jim and Jeff, all of you, past and present, and the Humane Society. We all need to be on the same page and focus on the same thing. It's not about individual personalities, and there should never be any negativity or personal bashing. It's good she wasn't at the last meeting.

Cpl. Rego thanked the board for doing this. It provided great ideas.

Chairman Rich asked Ms. Williams if she could review everything that was said. He can help her and Marcy prioritize the ideas.

Action Item: Ms. Williams will take the lists compiled during the workshop and create a document for the board and others to review.

IX. Adjourn

**Next Meeting: 4 p.m. April 1, 2024
Administrative Building F, 3rd Floor
Collier County Government Center**

There being no further business for the good of the County, the meeting was concluded at 6:04 p.m.

Collier County Domestic Animal Services



James Rich, Chairman

These minutes were approved by the Committee/Chairman on 04-01-24,
(check one) as presented , or as amended _____.