

Pet Friends™

Magazine of Northern Michigan

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Re: Animal Control Issues

Dear Commissioners,

As a pet owner, pet welfare volunteer and as a media person through Pet Friends, I have been following the horse abuse case of Dana Round and animal control issues that have been brought to the forefront because of it.

I am submitting my findings to you from my research which includes many county sources.

CURRENT PROBLEMS WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT

- I see no consistency of guidelines regarding who is responsible for specific animal control cases within the county (dog bites, neglect, abuse). Various sources reveal conflicting and incomplete information.
 - The county website says that Animal Control is responsible for abuse, neglect and dog bites (*see A*). However, the Health Department and Dean Bott (in answer to my question) says that it is the Sheriff's responsibility for all three. If that is true, why aren't those phone calls being forwarded to the Sheriff's Dept. and why is the county giving the public inaccurate information of who to contact in certain circumstances?
 - The health department's annual report says that Animal Control is responsible for dog bites (*see B*).
 - In an article in the Record-Eagle on March 20, 2012, it is reported that Animal Control investigated more than 180 dog bites (*see C*). That obviously shows that Animal Control, not the Sheriff's Department investigates dog bites. In the same article, Fred Keeslar says, "animal abuse and cruelty complaints are supposed to be handled by law enforcement under an agreement with the Sheriff." (*see D*). In addition, he states that Animal Control doesn't have the staff or expertise to conduct criminal abuse cases. I think the commissioners should ask for a copy of that agreement with the Sheriff to see exactly which department is supposed to handle which cases and check that against current Animal Control policies and procedures.
 - The Animal Control ordinance on the website specifically states in Section 202 that the Animal Control Agency shall capture, accept and confine unlicensed dogs, stray dogs, unwanted, abandoned and abused dogs (even though abuse is supposedly under the Sheriff's Dept.) (*see E*).
 - The Animal Control ordinance on the website does not mention horses anywhere. It only mentions dogs. Horse North volunteered at your county meeting to assist Animal Control. I think that receiving some training from them and/or having them be "on-call" for abuse/neglect cases should be something of serious consideration for the department.

The Animal Control ordinance on the website also doesn't mention cats. If you don't investigate cat cases (other than state laws like torture), your ordinance should state that. It should also state what wildlife cases you do/don't investigate. Your ordinances are very vague, leading residents to question what you do and who does it.

- In regard to the Dana Round horse case, AC officer Ed Hickey went out the first time to investigate in October of 2011. If this was the Sheriff's jurisdiction, why would he investigate the complaint? Then, when Deputy Postal went to Dana Round's property, he called Animal Control. Why would he do that if cruelty issues are the responsibility of the Sheriff's Department and why wouldn't he know that they don't work weekends? There doesn't appear to be much communication/collaboration between Animal Control and the Sheriff's Dept or understanding of their separate or combined duties concerning animals.
- Health Director Fred Keeslar and current acting AC supervisor Tom Buss are unqualified to be supervisors of the Animal Control department based on the county's job description (see F). In addition, the AC supervisor is not on-site as most (if not all?) of the other supervisors are within their departments. How was Tom Buss chosen to be acting supervisor and what kind of training was he given for the position?
- There is only one phone line for Animal Control. When I was there for approximately forty-five minutes on March 20, 2012, one of the Animal Control officers had to be called on their cell phone because someone couldn't get through on the regular line.
- The Annual Report states there is a 24-hours emergency service (see G) for Animal Control. That is not true. The number of the Sheriff's Dept. should be listed for emergencies and after hours if in fact the Sheriff's Dept. is responsible for certain kinds of animal cases – and if Animal Control is not dispatched after-hours or on the weekends.
- Repeat offenders are not dealt with in your animal control ordinance: Dana Round has 34 citations from Animal Control. There should be an ordinance where a certain number of citations leads to a person going to court and possibly having their animals seized and/or paying a very high fine.
- Although a source has told me that the Animal Control officers were deputized under Bensley, the question is what are they deputized to do? As far as I've been able to find out, the Animal Control officers need to be given the authority to do more when an animal is in danger. I have included a few paragraphs from the Leelanau County animal control ordinance which you should consider adding to Grand Traverse County:

1. The Animal Control Officer shall be properly deputized as a peace or police purposes of this Ordinance and shall be legally authorized to have the power his duty to issue appearance tickets, citations or summonses to those keeping or harboring dogs contrary to the provisions of this Ordinance.

2. The Animal Control Officer, his deputies or assistants are hereby authorized and empowered in accordance with the provisions of this Ordinance and an appropriate search warrant to enter upon private premises for the purpose of inspecting same for the purpose of determining the harboring, keeping and possessing of any dog or dogs for the specific purpose of determining if the owner of said dogs have complied with the appropriate provisions of the Ordinance and to apprehend and take with him any dogs for whom no license has been procured in accordance with this Ordinance or for any other violation thereof. The provisions of this subsection shall specifically include but not be limited to, investigation of or seizure for cruelty to animals.

3. The Animal Control Officer shall have the right to investigate complaints of dogs or other animals alleged to be dangerous to persons or property and shall have the right to seize, take up and impound such animals.

4. The Animal Control Officer shall have the right to investigate the complaints of cruelty to dogs or other animals, livestock or poultry and shall have the right to seize, take up and impound any dog or other animal, livestock or poultry which has been subject to such cruelty.

Lastly, if you decide to negotiate with the Cherryland Humane Society (CHS) regarding the use of their kennels for your dogs, I would like you to consider the following positive outcomes from a contract with them in addition to considerations to think about. One option I came across in my research was a county who rented space within a Humane Society, but kept jurisdiction over the county animals. This is similar, perhaps, to how things are handled in Charlevoix. You would, in essence, be renting kennel and office space within their building, while staffing your area with a full-time Animal Control Officer. Although some of the things below could also happen with an additional Animal Control officer on-site at Keystone, there are other advantages to housing dogs at CHS with an Animal Control officer on-site.

- Calls would be answered all day in person and routed to proper officer (i.e. Animal Control or Sheriff) and fees could be collected on-site.
- The hours of the Humane Society are much better than Animal Control, making it easier for a pet owner to reclaim their animal.
- Dogs could have blankets and toys, which they currently cannot because of time constraints and cleaning issues – and they would be in bigger, newer and less dangerous kennels.
- Dogs could be in an air conditioned building with proper ventilation (the animal control facility has an exhaust fan, no air conditioning)
- The officer at CHS could photograph and post lost pets on the website during their time on-site.
- Current animal control officers could spend more time on the road since they wouldn't have to be at the CHS facility twice a day like they are now (8:30 to 10:30 am and 4 to 5 pm). That would result in four extra hours a day on the road (morning shift - 2 hours per officer).
- The dogs would not be left alone most of the day as they are now
- Volunteers could possibly be used to help in the care of dogs (volunteers are not allowed at the Keystone AC facility)
- The Keystone location could be discontinued as an AC facility and used for another county purpose.
- If the person at CHS was the supervisor, that person could do the administrative duties and be on-location and directly supervising the animal control officers.
- Dogs are currently walked twice a day and fed once. On weekends, they are fed/walked once a day. Having an on-site animal control officers and utilizing volunteers could impact the quality of life of the dogs in your care, giving them more exercise and doing feedings more often.

Things to consider during negotiations:

- The guidelines of when a dog is euthanized and when they are adoptable should be given thorough consideration. 175 dogs were saved in 2011 by giving them to CHS and rescue groups. Whatever changes are made to AC should not impede this progress.
- Based on other contracts I've read, you should have a severability clause and meet semi-annually to discuss goals, quality improvement, etc.

In the end, the county commissioners and the residents must decide what their goals are concerning Animal Control and how much money it will take to properly serves the needs of both the animals and the residents of the community. This is my attempt to give you some information that you might not have and information that you might not have considered as you move forward discussing changes within Animal Control.

Thank you for your time and consideration,


Jennifer P. Isbell