

Gwinnett County Animal Task Force Minutes
April 10, 2012
7:00 p.m.
884 Winder Highway
Lawrenceville, Georgia

Members Present:

Kelly Alder, Vice Chair	Wanda Johnson
Elizabeth Burgner	Jon Richards
Donald Bush	Tatiana Romeo
Dr. Solveig Evans	Jane Stewart
Dr. Cathy Fish	Joel Taylor, Chairman
James Freeman	Dr. Wayne Wallis

Members Absent:

Curtis Northrup
Angie Peevy
Suzanne Pruitt
Pattie Szanti

Staff Present:

Assistant Chief West, Gwinnett County Police Department
Theresa Cox, Law Department

I. Call to Order

Time: 7:05 p.m.

II. Opening Remarks by the Chairman

Chairman Taylor opened with a few remarks regarding the public hearing on March 27, 2012, and stated that some time had been built into this meeting's agenda for a follow-up question and answer with the public.

III. Approval of Agenda

Motion to Approve: Jon Richards
Second: Wanda Johnson
Vote: 10-0 (Members Evans and Stewart Absent)

IV. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from March 20, 2012 Meeting & Minutes from March 27, 2012
Motion to Approve: Jon Richards
Second: Dr. Cathy Fish
Vote: 10-0 (Members Evans and Stewart Absent)

V. William Wise – Guest Speaker

Member Romeo introduced Mr. Wise, who is the Director of Walton County Animal Control. Mr. Wise has worked with the Athens-Clarke County, Georgia, Animal Control for 10 years, and then he worked as the Animal Control Superintendent for Newport News, Virginia. He left Newport News to become the Animal Control Director of Walton County. In Walton County he has tried to institute a new attitude to reduce euthanasia rates and improve Walton County Animal Control. The steps Mr. Wise took included being rescue friendly, using email blasts and social media, vaccinating/deworming younger dogs, testing all dogs for heartworm, and improving photographs.

Walton County allows the use of Facebook, but it is volunteer driven. The volunteer pulls information from the County's website for use on Facebook. The volunteer is asked to refer all questions to Animal Control and to make sure the public knows that they are not communicating with the Walton County Animal Control on the Facebook page. Mr. Wise personally updates the County's website about available animals all day Monday through Friday. The website is not updated on the weekends when he is not there. The use of social media, email blasts, and the county webpage has caused significant increases in adoption of dogs and reduction in euthanasia rates.

Mr. Wise stated that the process was not easy. He noted five areas that contribute to the improvement. The first is a division of labor. In Walton County, the animal shelter is separate from animal enforcement, and each has different officers. Second, Mr. Wise noted that it is important to have one point of contact to be able to plan for time and available space. Third, he explained the importance of select/market/hold. There are times when he has to make decisions about which animals will get posted. Not all animals get posted. The fourth area noted by Mr. Wise was communication. He authorizes all euthanasia procedures to avoid mistakes or confusion. Finally, Mr. Wise noted that change takes commitment. He has to keep a new attitude and ignore criticisms.

Walton County accepts donations for heartworm testing and vaccinations. He has worked out a system where the money goes into the County's general fund but comes back to the Shelter. Walton County also allows individuals to sponsor dogs. Walton places sponsors in touch with the rescues, but does not handle any sponsorship funds.

VI. Final Report Discussion – format, recommendations, etc.

There was a brief discussion of the format of the Task Force final product to the Board of Commissioners. Chairman Taylor requested that subcommittee chairs email him a written word document of each subcommittee's final recommendations. The Task Force will discuss the final recommendations at the next Task Force Meeting and work toward a consensus for the final report, but dissenting recommendations would be noted in the report.

VII. Subcommittees

No reports were given.

VIII. Public Hearing Follow-up Discussion & Questions & Public comment

Six members of the public spoke:

- Randy DeCarlo stated that Gwinnett now has an opportunity to bring in a new shelter manager qualified to run the shelter. Mr. DeCarlo feels Gwinnett needs to separate the shelter from animal control and hire a rescue coordinator. Mr. DeCarlo urged the Task Force to develop recommendations for the job description for the shelter manager and the future of the Animal Advisory Council.
- Carla Brown stated any new manager will have to want to do the job for change to occur.
- Jacki McDonald spoke on the need for breed identification and dog temperament education for officers. Ms. McDonald would also like to see owners who want to give up a pet be given resources to help them keep their pet. DeKalb already provides a list of resources.
- Joyce Krechting asked whether the Task Force had been discussing privatizing the shelter or making it separate from the police department. She stated that the police department is great, but should not be running the shelter. She also stated that the shelter needs its own budget and a way to accept donations.
- Lynn Guard spoke about the need for advertising and marketing and available resources. Ms. Guard also spoke on the need for a volunteer program and a photographer.
- Louise Stewart asked that officers continue to send leash law letters without requiring a citizen to file a complaint against a particular owner.

IX. Next ATF Meeting

April 24, 2012

X. Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn: Jon Richards

Second: James Freeman

Vote: 12-0

Time: 8:18p.m.