

TERM OF COMMISSION: December Session of the October Adjourned Term

PLACE OF MEETING: Roger B. Wilson Boone County Government Center
Commission Chambers

PRESENT WERE: Presiding Commissioner Kenneth M. Pearson
District I Commissioner Karen M. Miller
District II Commissioner Skip Elkin
Deputy County Clerk Joshua Norberg

The meeting was called to order at 9:34 a.m.

Auditor

Karen Frederick and Caryn Ginter, Auditor's Office, were present on behalf of this item.

1. Public Hearing for Consideration of Adoption of FY 2009 Budget

Ms. Ginter stated there had been no changes since the Auditor first presented the proposed budget earlier this year.

Commissioner Pearson opened the public hearing.

Amir Ziv, 904 N. 8th Street, Columbia

Mr. Ziv stated he created a short DVD for the Humane Society that they would like to show, and then there are some representatives from the Humane Society here to speak.

Mr. Ziv showed the DVD.

Maria Furey, 307 W. Ash, Columbia

Ms. Furey stated she is the Vice President of the board for the Humane Society. She stated she wanted to remind people that for the geographic area of Boone County, including the City of Columbia, that this year they anticipate taking in almost 4,000 animals. It costs approximately \$100 per animal to service them, so we should have almost \$400,000 for this geographic area to function. She stated the board is at a point where they are going to be voting on whether or not to keep their open door mission. She stated they have reached a financial crisis where they can no longer entertain keeping the open door. The open door mission means that we take everything that comes to the door regardless of health, temperament, adoptability, etc. She stated they wanted to make the Commission aware of the situation and ask them to consider funding them at a higher level. If they do not get the support from the community that they need, they will not be able to continue providing their services. She stated it is unfortunate, but that is the way it is right now.

Commissioner Miller asked if they received financial support from the other counties that send animals to them.

Ms. Furey stated some of them do to some degree. She stated right now they are making forays into those counties that send the most animals to ask for their support as well. 53% of the animals come from the Boone County area. She stated when they deal with areas outside of Boone County, they are usually communities that are small in population and don't have the tax base that Boone County offers. A lot of them don't even have an active animal control.

Commissioner Pearson asked if there is a charge for when someone brings an animal in.

Ms. Furey stated they do ask for a drop-off fee of \$20 per animal. At this point, they are going to make that mandatory, and they are probably going to move toward being selective about which animals they take in.

Commissioner Elkin stated he is planning on attending the board meeting tonight.

Ms. Furey stated the meeting is closed tonight, but Commissioner Elkin should probably be able to attend.

Patty Forrester, 3806 Zebra Drive, Columbia

Ms. Forrester stated she is the executive director of the Central Missouri Humane Society. She stated Ms. Furey presented their argument very well. A municipal shelter doesn't necessarily have the same mission as a humane society and that is where our conflict arises. Commissioner Miller asked a great question when she asked about the other counties. She stated that is why they are only asking for a portion of the operational funds for the shelter from Columbia/Boone County. They are not asking the City of Columbia to provide a bailout for an agency that has overextended itself, they are just asking for fair and reasonable compensation for the services that they provide. She stated they are absolutely willing to fundraise and have programs to help fund the rest of the mission that probable diverts from municipal shelter services. The Humane Society is on the cusp of deciding what their mission will be and whether it will continue to be municipal shelter services that provide an open door policy for stray and unwanted animals versus a limited admission shelter where they will only take in a certain number of animals. If that is the case, they have not yet decided who those animals will be. It might be to exclude other counties, or to just exclude all strays and only take in owned animals. It is very unclear at this time.

Commissioner Pearson asked if other communities in Boone County bring animals to the shelter.

Ms. Forrester stated they do.

Commissioner Pearson asked if they are paying for those.

Ms. Forrester stated many of them are. She stated they probably have about twelve individual contacts that pay on a per animal basis, such as Ashland and Hartsburg. When they talk about receiving animals from other counties, it is usually only a couple of animals per county. She stated Boone County is the major contributor, and Fulton is a close second because they are diverting people here to use our services.

Commissioner Elkin asked if the other communities just pay the drop-off fee.

Ms. Forrester stated they do. They hold their animals for the required stray period, and then they bring them to us for a chance at adoption, not necessarily housing.

Commissioner Pearson asked if it was correct that the current budget is \$1,000,000.

Ms. Forrester stated it is \$940,000.

Commissioner Pearson asked if they were asking for roughly a third of that budget.

Ms. Forrester stated they are asking for 53% of operational responsibilities. She stated they factored out all of the adoption programs, development and fundraising. The only categories that were included in the request were utilities, insurance, and staff that relates to cleaning kennels.

Commissioner Pearson asked if they are willing to have representation from the City and County on their board.

Ms. Forrester stated she can't speak on behalf of the whole board, but they are an open-minded group of individuals and she thinks they would welcome the conveyance of information. She stated she thinks they would be fine with that.

Commissioner Elkin asked if they still take the animals if the person dropping them off says they can't afford the drop-off fee.

Ms. Forrester stated this is the difference between open door and limited admission. Right now if someone tells us that they don't have the money for the drop-off fee, we tell them to give us what they can. If they don't have any money we send them away with an envelope and a manager pleads with them to support us. Right now, no one is refused. She stated if we decide to make the drop-off fee mandatory then the person who can't pay will end up being turned away.

Commissioner Elkin stated he is wondering the percentage of animals that are dropped off when the shelter doesn't collect the fee.

Ms. Forrester it was probably about a fourth or a third. She stated they anticipated intake fees generating over \$150,000 and they have probably gotten about \$50,000.

Commissioner Elkin asked if she thinks if people would stop bringing animals in if they raised

the fee.

Ms. Forrester stated she thinks they will still have the same ratio because people who are willing to give aren't going to care about the five dollars. The people who cannot afford the fee are not going to pay it anyway. The enforcement of the policy is what matters, and that is what the shelter is going to have to decide on. She stated they are fighting financially to keep their mission the same. They don't want to have to say no to an animal. That is not easy.

Commissioner Pearson stated when the Humane Society met with the Condo Board previously, they said that they were going to restructure some of the services or reduce the hours of employees. He asked if they had done that.

Ms. Forrester stated they had. She stated they have tightened their neck as much as they possibly can. She stated it has saved them some money, but there is nowhere else to save. They are spending money on staff to care for the animals and they are spending money on items they need to take care of the animals.

Ms. Furey stated the statistics are available on their web page.

Mike Martin, 206 S. Glenwood, Columbia

Mr. Martin stated he is here on behalf of the budget as a whole and the budgets in the community. He stated it concerns him that we are having conversations like this about support for an organization that is as critical as an animal control center. The Humane Society portion is a private service, but they also serve as an animal control center. It seems to fit a pattern where we have conversations about mental health care, about jail space, and now about the Humane Society. We are not focusing on basic services that get down to the people. It seems like we can always find the money for other things. The City is thinking about taking some land to build a museum. In the era of tight budgets, when they tell the public there is no money, that comes up for discussion. He stated he has become a sort of conduit for people who are frustrated in the community. He hears an awful lot from folks who feel like they can't be heard. That is one of the reasons he found out about the Humane Society. We don't know how to be heard in the midst of a city and a county that really is becoming a support lifeline for the wealthy and the powerful in a lot of ways. We have spent tens of millions of dollars on all kinds of things that don't help the average citizen that much. He stated there is a linkage there, but it is not the grassroots, ground level help for the average citizen like an animal control facility is. We don't have enough police; we don't have a big enough jail; we don't have enough sheriffs; we have a city that is being overrun by criminals. He stated that also reflects a lack of attention and a lack of spending in that area. That is unfortunate. He stated he can address the Commission as a partisan commission. He stated he can't do that with the City Council or the school board, but the Commission are all Democrats. He stated the Democrats he knows stand for the kinds of services that organizations like this provide. The basic dogma of the party is that the little guy comes first, and we are not doing that here. We need to start doing it because we are at a critical juncture in our nation's history right now where we are watching the gradual collapse of an entire leadership culture

based on unsound economic principles that have forsaken the basic moral principles that made this country great. He stated he would really urge the Commission to support organizations like this, and really look at its mission as a human service organization first and foremost. One of those things he would like to see is to hold the meetings at a time when the general public can attend. Monday at 9:30 a.m. is tough for people to get out to. That is one of the reasons you don't see as many people here as are at the City Council meetings. He stated if he seems frustrated at times it is because there is so much that he hears and so many people that he talks to and it gets to be a bit of a psychological burden at times. He stated we can all work together to relieve these things. We have a great town and great people running things and we have a lot of organizations with great missions, and they just need our support.

Commissioner Pearson asked for other comments.

There were no other comments.

Commissioner Pearson closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Pearson stated he knows that this is an issue that is of concern to the public. He stated we are all in difficult times.

2. Commissioner Reports

There were no commissioner reports.

3. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

The meeting adjourned at 10:03 a.m.

Attest:

Kenneth M. Pearson
Presiding Commissioner

Wendy S. Noren
Clerk of the County Commission

Karen M. Miller
District I Commissioner

Skip Elkin
District II Commissioner