

MINUTES  
Advisory Board to  
Memphis Animal Services

NOVEMBER 10, 2009

Present were:

Board Members:

Cindy Sanders

Michelle Buckalew

Allen Iskiwitz

Janet Hooks, Ex-Officio

Carol Katz

Janice Taylor Vaughn

Frank James

Jackie Johns

Visitors:

22 members of public and press

Michelle called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m.

Minutes of the October meeting had been approved as written by email.

Janet announced that Ernest Alexander is no longer employed as Director of MAS and Mayor Wharton has appointed Lucy Shaw (business consultant) and Darryl Eldridge (interim facilities administrator). A Special Task Force (STF) has been put in place to look at "best practices" to apply in revising shelter operations. The Mayor will attend this meeting.

As background to the current crisis, Carol stated that problems that led up to the raid were brought to the Administration and not taken seriously. She said that it took over eight months of constant requests to obtain a policies and procedures manual. Budget information was flatly refused to the Board. Information necessary to fully function as an Advisory Board should have been provided. Five board members consistently brought matters relating to inhumane treatment of animals, employees' unprofessional attitude, lack of transparency, and no accountability to the Administration but the Advisory Board got no cooperation. Allen said at one time the Advisory Board was written out of the city charter under Keenon McCloy so that the reformed MAS Advisory Board was "under the radar." No one on the STF has contacted the Advisory Board to coordinate information or ask our opinion. The Advisory Board is still under the radar.

Michelle asked Janet whether the Mayor knew of the Advisory Board before appointing a Special Task Force. Janet said yes, she made

everyone aware that there is an Advisory Board but the Mayor wanted an independent body appointed. Janet said the Mayor could speak to that himself. She further stated that the Administration has no problem sharing budget or any other information with the Advisory Board. Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) are being reviewed. A team of four from the American Humane Society met with her on Friday and went over SOP for the purpose of training employees. Janet said the new SOP will be shared with the board at our retreat.

Michelle expressed concern with having two different bodies not interacting or coordinating yet working toward a common goal. Our information gained over the past year has not been shared with the Mayor. Cindy also expressed concern that the Advisory Board is not being taken seriously by the Mayor, even though the Advisory Board was at the forefront of information that led to the raid. Janet pointed out that there is a representative of the board on the STF, Frank James. She said that the STF will be disbanded in six weeks from its inception, and there was no intention to eliminate the Advisory Board from the discussion. Janet said that she has kept the Chairman of the Advisory Board informed since the raid. It was imperative to get someone into the shelter immediately to go over documentation, talk to employees, etc. Janet said she is happy to share information with the Advisory Board

Michelle noted that the board member who was named to the STF is at odds with the board majority on almost every issue, especially issues relating to employees. The truth regarding what was going on with the shelter is like an onion. It has many layers to it. Cindy said that board meeting minutes are available on Furry Friends website which provide information to understanding what led up to the raid.

Carol asked (1) how the liaison between the STF and the Advisory Board in the short term of six weeks will be accomplished, and (2) when criminal indictments will be forthcoming. Janet said no report has been released regarding the criminal aspects of the case and that there is no definitive time frame. Regarding the STF, she said that there would be an opportunity to liaison with this group through the preliminary report that will be generated prior to the next meeting. This preliminary report will be shared with the board. It will address staffing, training, operating procedures, sanitation, city ordinances, etc. The advisory board can comment upon by forwarding information to Janet or Lucy Shaw or Darryl Eldridge. Jackie asked whether the board could attend the next STF meeting. Janet said she would look into an opportunity for interaction and get back with Michelle. The STF has met twice so far.

Allen asked what the criteria was for appointment to STF, and whether the board could submit names of people who would be an asset to the STF. Janet said to email her with names and they would be considered. Cindy pointed out that we, the board appointees, are charged by the city charter with doing exactly what the STF is asked to do. Michelle said that the Mayor should have the minutes of our meetings.

The first agenda item related to coordinating efforts of different agencies investigating elder abuse, child abuse and animal abuse. MAS officers need to report evidence of other types of abuse to the appropriate agencies. MLG&W and Comcast can aid in this effort.

Cindy spoke to rash of animal shootings in the community. Training is needed for police officers, perhaps with help of MAS. Training is also needed in animal cruelty cases. Only one or two MAS officers are bringing the cruelty cases to court and getting proper charges brought against the perpetrators.

Allen asked about off site adoptions. Janet said adoption policy is under review. Michelle said that these efforts have suffered as a result of negative publicity. Petco has concerns regarding the health of the animals that are offered at these adoptions events. Animals under one year of age are especially susceptible to parvo and distemper. MAS should not offer an animal that could be diseased and cause an adoptive client expense and anxiety. Michelle suggested that quarantine might be a good step before future offsite adoptions. Janet asked the board to input adoption policy recommendations on this issue to her. Janet reiterated that MAS is using new technology to process intake animals, to which the board expressed approval. Janet said some policies could be implemented before others. Michelle said Memphis has become a national story and it is up to the board to demand change. Janet said accountability is key to addressing these problems before they fester over time.

Carol asked what it would take to get the off-site adoption events back on track. Janet said the vet in charge is Dr. Coleman. There is a significant problem with distemper among young dogs adopted from MAS. Cindy advised that puppies need series of vaccinations for at least 12 weeks to be fully inoculated from those diseases. Good adoption policy is for MAS to vaccinate puppies the entire series, only after which puppies can be adopted. Payment options should be available. If city golf courses can take credit cards, so can MAS.

What changes can be expected at MAS after the raid? Michelle said if there is the same attitude and the same accountability, a new shelter building won't change the situation. Allen was concerned that many of the same policies will be in place but if the employees are the same employees, we will end up back where we were. Frank then asked, "Do you want just to clean house?" (Public applause). Allen said that was fine with him because MAS is a national disgrace. Frank asked that employees be evaluated and given time to do this. He said that the employees are not all bad. Cindy and Allen readily agreed with this. Frank adamantly felt that the employees have a hard task. But other members felt that the animals suffered much more due to poor management. Frank stated in effect that the raid was a sham and the photos were of different dogs. Other board members disagreed. Michelle reiterated that the board is in full agreement that not every employee is a bad employee.

Janice said that Cindy had previously stated that she wanted Frank put off the board. Cindy denied this. Janice said the board was repetitious and asked the same questions over and over. She submitted to the board two letters she had sent to Mayor Lowery and Mayor A C Wharton, praising Director Alexander, complaining of the appointment of Jackie and Cindy to the board, and requesting that the present board be abolished and another reestablished.

{Mayor Wharton stepped in at this point and made the following remarks: He is interested in moving forward. Criminal investigation is in hands of District Attorney. He wants to have a separate meeting with board within the next month. He wants our recommendations and suggestions to establish a "best" shelter.)

After Mayor Wharton left, Janice continued. She said complaints were constant month after month, and that Cindy and Jackie had made these same complaints before they were on the board. Janice felt these complaints had been a waste of time. If it were not for these complaints, the raid would not have happened. She said that no one had her permission to use her email to contact her. Janice also wanted to know why Michelle didn't notify her or the board about the raid or the STF. Michelle denied knowing about either the raid or STF until after the fact. Carol said we have indeed raised the same issues month after month because we do not have power to make the necessary changes. Janet said that she sensed Janice's frustration relative to the task the board has before it and that was the purpose in having a retreat. Janet reiterated her desire to promote a strategic plan of action as a board to move forward, to spend time writing an aggressive adoption program, to

formulate recommendations as to best practices to implement, and to formulate a document that remedies the problems.

The meeting was then opened to public comments:

Diane McManus: Has witnessed abuse at MAS for 40 years.

Tantianna Wood: Watched the shelter for 24 hours. Watched employee spray feces into water bowls. We need people who care. Worms and disease are spread into adjoining cages. Food and water are contaminated. (Pictures of this were presented to the board). (To Frank): This is not an acceptable practice. We have people who care about animals who want to sit on this board. You are on the board to represent citizens who care about animals.

Michelle Buckelew: I have seen the hose used as a weapon against the dogs.

Janice responded that she had the feeling that the people here do not love mankind and do not love her and do not respect either her or Frank. Human beings are working at the shelter and you don't love them. She asked, "How do you know that others hired wouldn't break the law?"

Tantianna Wood: We are willing to give our time to produce 24 hours of camera shots. If you don't want to make changes and leave MAS to look like the hellhole that it is, then continue to sit on the board.

(Some argument ensued as to who was a Christian.)

Barbara Standing: We need to get real and admit the problems. I adopted a dog from MAS and she is dead after spending \$500 on her. Why is no one from Mid South Spay and Neuter on the board? Overcrowding is the problem. A member of this organization should be on the board.

Jan Courtney: I'm at the shelter on my lunch break. There are volunteers doing a wonderful job, but employees who do not take the time to do their job. They chat with one another while the volunteers do their job. My question to Director Hooks is whether you are benchmarking with no-kill shelters to deal with the problems?

Janet Hooks: A spay and neuter program is on the table, all aspects of this issue. It is an integral part of what we need to do to educate the public. We are addressing no-kill policies but this is affected by the fact

that we have an open-door policy. We are trying to strike a balance with 17,000 dogs coming in yearly.

Jan Courtney: There is a STF member who cannot be objective.

Janet Hooks: That is a subjective matter. We have independent vets, we have different organizations represented.

(Unidentified): We did the hard work. We documented the problems, we sent the emails, and so we have a deep interest in what will be done.

Melody: Visiting hours should be conducive to the public so they can visit the shelter.

Janet Hooks: We are looking at putting up pictures on the web, Operating hours are being considered and may be changed, but that will require additional staff. Shelter hours may be extended and dogs may be held longer.

Michelle Buckelew: Shelters increasingly across the country are changing hours to close on Monday and open on Sunday.

Stephanie Hanscom: Is anyone in the city working on grants for the shelter? What about vanity auto license tags?

Michelle Buckelew: MAS does not have non-profit status for grants. License tag is good idea. Also, we have considered asking MLG&W to do a check off for us.

Janet Hooks: Euthanasia is still being done for medical reasons, but not for temperament or other reasons. The shelter is currently being run in "emergency mode" but responding to bites, vicious dogs and injured animals.

Janet Hooks: (responding to someone who stated that MAS had co-partnered some years ago with MS Spay and Neuter as a service provider under a grant). This may be an area that the board can help identify grants that may be available to MAS.

(Unidentified): Suggested holding puppies until vaccination series are completed. Don't allow to be adopted out until then.

(Unidentified): Is the policy being maintained that pit bulls are euthanized and not adopted out?

Carol Katz: I believe the policy was changed to allow adoptions of pit bulls, if temperamentally appropriate. At this point, however, all policies are subject to change.

(Unidentified): Why are those employees still working there?

Cindy Sanders: We are coming out of an administration that did not do evaluations or documentation. Employees cannot be removed from their jobs without documentation.

Allen Iskiwitz: The immediate problem is documenting employee accountability and doing evaluations.

Frank James: Before you can get rid of an employee you have to have every i and t dotted.

Chester Burns: Memphis has the highest rate of police dog shootings in United States, a rate higher than New York or Los Angeles. It is a huge problem.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol Smith Katz, Secretary

Next Meeting: Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2009, 10:00 a.m. City Hall

Retreat Date: Tuesday, January 12, 2010, time and location TBA