

Letters to the Editor

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Humane Society continues shelter outcry

Dear Tamara:

I was in attendance at the last city council meeting. To my everlasting surprise, our Mayor, whose term has thus far been characterized by passivity and lack of direction, has found a noble cause and has embarked on a crusade! His foe--the local chapter of the Humane society whose members (mostly ladies) volunteer to help the city by investigating animal cruelty, staging adoptathons and helping at the local shelter -- giving of their time, money and sometimes risking physical injury to help his paid employees. Their offense -- they had an employee arrested for animal cruelty (whether or not he was guilty of anything was apparently not worth discussing or investigating). Their punishment -- banishment from the animal shelter and forfeiture of the very property on which it resides (which the Humane Society owns and very generously allows them to use free of charge).

The City Attorney, Mr. Alan Cline, attempted to inject a bit of reason by pointing out that both the agreement between the city and the Humane Society and the ordinance that was subsequently passed had problems that lead to several possible conflicting interpretations. He recommended that the city and the Mayor take no action that would precipitate legal action until he has a chance to research the issues and to try to resolve the differences behind closed doors. Unfortunately, these remarks fell on deaf ears.

he was out there. The Mayor may be on to something, though. If he and the Aldermen were to take turns going out to the shelter to clean up, the taxpayers would actually have something to show for having gone to the trouble of electing them in the first place. (If His Honor the Mayor can't find his way out to the shelter, he could ask the Channel 5 News Team for directions. They are only too familiar with the way.)

It is too easy to write off the job of animal control officers as simply being "dogcatchers". Their duties range from the mundane cleaning of kennels and picking up road kill to intervening in dangerous situations involving angry people and vicious dogs. There are a goodly number of laws that govern their actions in the field. There are methods to be learned about dealing with angry people and handling dangerous animals. There are techniques to be learned about the equipment that they use such as capture poles, sterilization equipment, and dart guns. It is rare to have someone walk in off the street having any of these skills. Most of them must be taught and it is here that one of the most important roles of the Humane Society is to be found. For too long the relationship between the Humane Society, the Animal Control Officers and the Mayor's office had been dysfunctional and lately adversarial. Most of the difficulties that have happened would have been avoided had the Mayor

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The Mayor went on to explain that this was not the only problem that these nefarious women had caused. He seems to think these diabolical ladies spend their days running around gathering live rodents, dead desiccated rodents, rodent nests, and rodent excrement. Late at night they creep out to the shelter and very carefully strew the rodent debris throughout the shelter so that they can return the next day and accuse the shelter employees of not doing their jobs. Unbelievable!

At this point I expected that our City Aldermen would try to rein in the Mayor before he did any more damage. Stunningly, only one Alderman had the temerity to brook the Mayor. Alderman Chris Oswalt rose to defend the ladies stating that he had made a trip out to the shelter at night and witnessed the rodent refuse. For his trouble he was shouted down by the Mayor who vigorously upbraided him for not cleaning the shelter, as long as

utilized the expertise of the Humane Society in training of his men instead of fostering their disrespect. The care of the animals has suffered; it is time for this to change.

It is time for the City Council to step up to the plate and act decisively before the city is embroiled in an expensive lawsuit and becomes the subject of more bad publicity. It should form a committee of Aldermen and Humane Society members whose responsibility would be oversight of the Animal Shelter. The Aldermen's first responsibility should be to investigate the alleged animal cruelty and settle the issue for once and for all. The committee's first duty would be to work together with the Animal Control Department to develop policies for the shelter so everyone will know precisely what their duties are and can work to that standard.

It's just not that complicated.

Sincerely,
Frank Schwartz