

# City, Humane Society begin talks

Kendall Owens  
T-H Staff Writer

A committee made up of members of the Forrest City Council and Forrest City Area Humane Society met Tuesday in an effort to bring resolution to months of bickering between the two sides over operations at the Forrest City Animal Shelter.

Council members Chris Oswalt, Cecil Twillie and Glenn Shepherd represented the council during the meeting and FCAHS president Gail Carey,

Ruth Ann Vowan and Janie Hicks represented the Humane Society. City Attorney Alan Cline and Mayor Gordon McCoy also attended the meeting with Cline mediating.

The meeting opened with Carey telling council members that the Humane Society wanted to form the committee in an effort to resolve the issues between the two parties. Carey said that one of the primary issues in the matter was ownership of the land that

animal shelter sits on.

"We wanted to form this committee in an effort to bring about some resolution to the issues that we've had and one of those issues is the city's building being built on our land. It is considered an improvement and has added value to the land," said Carey.

Cline responded saying that he had letters from Chris Morledge, who was attorney for the Humane Society at the time

See HUMANE, Page 2

(Continued from Page 1)

of the original agreement, to the effect that the council had been told that if the area that the property sits on was ever annexed into the city, the property would then be turned over to the city. Carey responded saying that the wording was used when the property was leased to the city, but that the lease was never signed.

"All that aside I don't think a judge would let you keep a building that you did not pay for without you paying some type of just compensation. If the Humane Society is taking the position that they own the building then the city has to do something else because I don't think any of us in here believe that the taxpayers would like to continue to pay the utilities on a building that they do not own," said Cline.

Vowan said that some of the concerns in regard to the land and building dealt with a lack of control by the Humane Society.

"I've worked in a large land office and it is not unusual to see a government entity lease land from a private landowner. But in this instance there has been such a lack of control with what takes place out there that my concern would be if we sign the land over, then we have no more control," said Vowan.

Hicks requested copies of the information that Cline was referring to and Cline told the Humane Society members that he would present the information at the proper time and in the proper format.

"The situation that has evolved out there is simply not

workable," said Cline. "I don't think it is a good practice anywhere to have two semi-antagonistic parties sharing space in the same building and that's what we have at this point," said Cline.

After considerable discussion Vowan questioned whether the city might consider accepting only the land that the shelter sits on without taking all of the Humane Society property.

"We probably have about two acres out there. My question is, would the city be willing to accept just the land that the building sits on and allow us to keep the remainder of the property because there are things that we would like to do to develop that land," said Vowan.

No one voiced an objection to Vowan's proposal, but Twillie said that it was important that the land issue be settled before any other progress be made.

"We have to determine ownership of the land in my opinion. We need to know exactly who owns what so that we can determine autonomy and determine lines so that we know when one party or the others lines have been crossed," said Twillie.

After questions arose in regard to whether the issue had to be settled during Tuesday's meeting, Twillie clarified saying, "No, all of the issues can be decided in one document, but ownership of the property has to be at the top of that list."

The committee also agreed to the formation of an Animal Control Committee which would meet on a regular basis and oversee operations at the facility.

Shepherd suggested a committee made up of Humane Society members, council members and at-large members of the community. Twillie stressed that one of the goals of the committee would be to set up a specific job description for animal control officers and a grievance process.

"I am a directions person. If you give a person a specific list of directions that they can follow, then you can come back and say did you do this, did you do this. If not you put yourself in the position of liking or not liking a person which has nothing to do with his or her job. It's whether they did the job," said Twillie.

One issue both sides agreed on was the need for additional staffing at the facility. McCoy said that the council had agreed to allow him to hire a third part-time employee which would allow some scheduling changes. Members of the Humane Society expressed concern over access to the building if the property and equipment and medicine that they store in the facility if the property is turned over to the city.

"We want to be able to have access to the animals because we provide medicine for them and socialize them and we want to be able to hold adopt-a-thons," said Carey.

McCoy told the group that if a third person is hired, the hours could be extended at the facility and weekend hours could be created. Cline questioned the Humane Society members as to how many days a week extended hours would be needed and how long the hours needed to be extended to. Humane Society members said that extended the

hours to 8 p.m. two days per week along with Saturday access should be acceptable.

Vowan told council members that she logs the intake information into the computers and that there are times that people request dogs at hours when the facility isn't open. Oswalt said that he had expressed his concerns regarding that matter with the mayor in the past.

"What we have as far as operating hours are inaccessible to the working public, not only at the Animal Shelter, but at City Hall and the Civic Center as well. I think we should have a city employee on site at least two days a week until, let's say, 8 p.m. which would give you all extended access after you get off work on those two days and possibly on Saturday as well," said Oswalt.

Twillie said that a set schedule of when the facility is open should eliminate some of the issue with accessibility to the general public.