

St. Clair County Animal Services

Minutes for Meeting

Conference Room: 6:00 P.M.

February 24th, 2025

Members Present:

Robert Trentman, Chairman
Scott Greenwald, Asst. Chairman
Mike O'Donnell
Lonnie Mosley
G.W. Scott, Jr.
Robert Wilhelm

Others Present:

Mark Kern, County Board Chairman
Herb Simmons, EMA Director
Robert Allen, County Board member
Myla Blandford, Health Department Director
Lexi Cortez, Belleville News Democrat
John Coers, County Board member
Matt Smallheer, County Board member
Marty Crawford, County Board member
Phil Henning, County Board member
Eddie Johnson, Animal Services Warden
Dawn Blackwell, Animal Services Adoption Center Manager

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Mr. Trentman.

Roll Call and Declaration of Quorum

Stand for the Pledge of Allegiance

Roll call and a quorum declared present.

Public Comment:

Mr. Trentman: Public comment. Please keep your questions or comments to about 2 minutes and direct them towards this chair. Do I hear anybody? Does anyone have a public comment?

This is it right here. If you could state your name, for the record, you don't have to.

Vicki: Ok, I'll do it. Vicki, V-I-C-K-I, Lehares, L-E-H-A-R-E-S. I assisted Found A Hound Rescue, the Sunday before last. We were notified that there were 30 some animals living on an abandoned property, running loose. We were called to assist. We did go out there and we ended up getting 30+ dogs. There were 3 deceased and also a cat that was in the back of a dog house. We did get it out, it was dying. I personally took it and ended up taking it from Waterloo to Glen Carbon to Hawthorne, where it was humanely euthanized. The cat didn't even have veins, they had to do an injection in the heart. All I can say is that he didn't die alone. We were- the conditions were something I have never seen. It's not habitable out there. The dogs had no shelter, maybe four doghouses and a lot of open sheds that were full of debris. One of the dogs has a sliced foot. There was just nothing. Most of them were starving. My concern is that animal control had been notified. I have a statement from a woman who; I'll just read it to you. She said I actually called the police and animal control February 2nd because a herd of 19 dogs were wondering in the middle of Floraville Rd in Waterloo. I initially was just trying to get them off the road to see if they belonged to someone only to find that up that drive was a sketchy compound with all these poor dogs. Two St Clair County Deputies came to the property because we could not get out. The 19 would not leave my side. I initially just tried to put them in the car, pick them up, but we couldn't pick them up without a struggle. My husband was consoling my screaming 4 year old. Police told me to file a report with Animal Control, which I did on the 3rd, who then told me it was a Department of Agriculture problem. Called them 3 times that week only got voicemails, no call back. Her husband also went up to St Clair County and was told that there was nothing really that they could do. The post that I saw that we were informed of Ms. Jett from Animal Control, posted several comments, said yes we seen them on the road many times. She said that she was out there a year ago for a call for 100 dogs and there were only 9, that they were all being cared for, had a fenced area, everything was fine. There is absolutely, I find that very hard to believe. Ms. Jett said that there was nothing that could be done. In my opinion that property was not been, it has not been just within the last few months that it has gotten into that condition. 30 plus dogs has been going on a long time. They have been seen on the road, they have been seen at neighbors' properties. It was appalling, and if two very small, non for profit rescues, with a total of about 5 people can go in and do what was done, I question how and why a government agency, that is tax funded for this purpose has ignored this situation, blowing everyone off and saying nope, there is nothing that we can do. That's unacceptable. I don't understand it. I want to know what animal control, when they were out there. I want to see a report. I've got pictures of the property that I took personally, if your guys want to see them. I've got the vet record from where I took the cat to, Hawthorne and the shape that he was in. Like I said, I'm looking for answers. I'm looking to find out...5 people were tasked to go out there and do not because apparently Animal control couldn't, wouldn't, didn't. I don't understand that. I would kind of like an explanation.

Mr. Trentman: Sure. Anybody else?

Sue: I'm Sue Shultz, S-H-U-L-T-Z. I am also an attorney and do some pro bono work for Lost Paws Trapping. The situation that's been presented, I had sent to Chris Allen videos that were taken of the dog and the cat that was literally dying, absorbing its own body. Its horrific. I echo that there

is no way that just happened in the last couple of weeks. Clearly some of the animals that were in the cat decaying, that was there February 2nd, when the Sheriff's Deputies were out the first time. Under the Humane Care for Animals Act, section 304, law enforcement officers can act. Law enforcement officers should act. Also, the wardens are allowed. If that's not their job, then whose job, is it? And under 12a of the act, when the owners cannot correct the situation its mandatory the animals are to be taken, and I don't know how you correct what you saw out there. So, it may be one thing to say we had a call before and they were being fed and taken care of but by the time that Heather Bishop and Vicki were in there looking at what they were seeing, there was no denying what was out there. And to say it's not our job, again pretty unacceptable. Hopefully, that's not St Clair Counties level of humane care of animals.

Mr. Trentman: Thanks. Thanks for the comment. Anyone else?

Heather: Heather Bishop, Bishop Small Dog Rescue. I literally live three houses down from this property. I am new to the area, so I had no prior history as to what was going on, however, I have a good relationship with my inspector, Stacy and she was out there 12 years ago, so I know this has been going on a long time and I know it's been called on. I've had several people come to me and tell me that they have tried to get the dog back to the property, have called PD, have called animal control, have had the PD out there. Animal control has never gone out there for anybody, I'm told. I've called animal control probably 10 times, finally left a message, a couple messages, called back again, pretty much got laughed at for trying to create a report on the situation. My husband came home that Friday, hit one of the dogs in the road, it's a bad spot were it's at. He was traumatized obviously for obvious reasons. Came home, got me, and we went out to the property, because at that point, I had found out that there was two elder gentlemen that lived there. So, I was worried for their welfare as well as the dogs obviously. We went up there, we knocked on doors, nobody was around. We were surrounded by over 25 dogs, was my initial count, and they just came coming out of building and places that I don't even know how they got into. There ended up being a dead cat and two dead dogs. My husband found 2 baby puppies with their eyes just open, 3 baby puppies, sorry, curled up with a dead dog, which was in a doghouse. He did take those out and put them into a chore bucket that he had in the back of his truck. He turned around to continue to see if anyone was on the property and a cat took one of those puppies right out of the bucket and ate it. So, we at that point took the puppies back to my house and I called Stacy, told her what was going on. She said you are ok. Get the puppies warm and try to find the mom. So we went back out and tried to find mom, did find her, thank God, because I don't want to bottle feed puppies, but yeah, there was over 30 dogs, we know of at least two others that were picked up off the road that those people have taken into their homes. I picked up one from there last May, that was in a neighbor's barn and I know she came from there because she looks like all the rest of them. They all look similar. It was horrendous you guys, I don't even want to see anything like that ever again and I've seen a lot. I've been a rescue for 13 years, I've seen a lot but nothing like that. And I will say that the dogs were being fed, none of them were like emaciated. The momma was skinny but she probably nursing when the food was put down for them. According to the man that says he was the Power of Attorney; he says that he was going out there every day and feeding them. My husband and I locked them in Friday night back in the area that I figured they were contained in, because I have never seen them running like that, in a pack by the road before. The next morning, I called Stacy, and she said that I could go back out there and check on them. She was like don't hang around, we need to find out who owns this property and who is responsible. So, I went back out, the gate was strapped back open with a bungee strap and all the dogs were loose again. I did come to find out that he was doing this because he had had to cut several of

the out of the fence, they got their heads stuck trying to get out. The stated Power of Attorney, the gentleman's name is Mike Massey. I don't know him, like I said we are new, 2 and a half years new to the area, but I have never seen anything like that, and it broke my heart. I am literally three doors down from me, a small dog licensed rescue where all I do is small dogs 20 pounds and under, here I have 30 more in the last week. So, it's been, I look like death because I also am a tax accountant, so I've been working 60 hour weeks and taking care of 49 animals. I just want an answer because there is no reason to be laughed at. I did call the police out. They were out there, said that there was nothing that they could do when I do know that under the laws, they can. I want answers. I want to know why it has gone on for, according to Waterloo Vet, where I took one of the dogs to, who has heartworm and I'm sure more do, this has been going on for over 30 years. And I knew it had been going on for over 12 because my inspector sent me photographs from that point in time.

Mr. Trentman: Ok, well thank you for your comment. Anybody else?

Tim Price: I'm more of a realist. I work for a government agency myself. I understand how some of this stuff goes. I don't think by any means that it is an unwillingness to help, on behalf on animal control from what I have dealt with animal control myself. I've been around rescue through my wife for a long time, through and through animals. I think it's more of an inability. I think the question is how do we avoid this in the future, if it can even be unavoidable. We all know that all the rescue organizations are overflowing as we speak. They have no room for them. We can't as taxpayers spend millions of dollars to enlarge a facility to handle this situation on a surprise. I don't think any of us want to see the shelter go back to a kill shelter, but that the only other possibility that I see. The only other thing that I can think of is that we try to get word out there more to get people to foster. Foster for the humane society or whoever it is, it allows them to pull from animal control and gives them room. I just don't want to see one situation cause any of us to overreact in such a way that causes more harm in the long run such as along the lines of a kill shelter.

Mr. Trentman: Great, anyone else that has not spoke yet?

I would just like to react to Mr. Price's comment. It took two small animal rescues to go out there and take care of the situation, just a few normal people. We have trained people with a nice facility that need to network with the rescues, so they don't have to feel that burden all on their own, and that's the solution to the problem. It's not a kill shelter, you are right, it shouldn't go back to that. Just reaching out, reaching out. I mean when people are calling and getting turned away or getting told that nothing can be done, that's all....talk about passing the buck or whatever you want to call it. That's nonsense. There is a whole room of people here concerned about this and no one could talk to each other and do something about it...that's my concern. I think at the humane society, that they need to draw up a plan for this in the future and have the contact information that they need to get the help, if they can't handle the situation. That's all I'm saying.

Mr. Trentman: Thanks for the comment, anyone else?

Approval of Minutes:

MOTION: by Mr. Mosley to approve the minutes of January 27th, 2025 meeting. Second by Mr. Greenwald.

Vote: Yes: 6 No: 0 Motion Carried.

Ashley Report

Mr. Trentman: Reports from Ashley Jett, our AC Director.

Ashley: So, for the month of January we were at a 92.5% live release rate. We did twenty-one adoptions, which is great for us. I'm sorry 17 adoptions. It's been rough. We had a really rough January. We are full, our shelter is at capacity every single day. When a kennel opens another dog is coming in. We have a waitlist for taking in strays. We have rescues that we network to every single week, and we are still unable to get them to pull from animal control. So, it's not for lack of trying to get animals pulled out of animal control, it's that they just don't. You can see on our report, we had fourteen animals transferred out of the building to rescue organizations in the month of January. That's not even a 10th of what we should normally have pulled. We should be able to take in 100 plus animals every single month which is what it would require for us to be able to help every single person in need. 14 animals when we have 42 kennels is not enough. I mean I understand everyone is full, but I think that there are ways around it. We moved 15 animals to our adoption center alone. So, it's rough and we have dedicated almost a whole additional section of animal controls kennels, to animals that are adoptable so that we can get them fixed and try to get some of the strays out of our animal services facility, just to get things to move. Because there are adoptable animals that nobody will take. So, they sit there until they have sat there for long enough to create some sort of issue like cage reactivity or frustration or harm to themselves where we have a choice to euthanize them. I mean it's not easy, we are all trying to work together to figure this out, but it is not easy. We are, we all come to work every single day, we all try our best, we are doing everything that we possibly can. I mean everybody feels it. Our animal control feels it too. We are not a 501c3 organization, we can't fundraise money to help. We have a budget, and that's what we have. And we are providing so much more than what a normal animal control would do. Normal animal controls don't hold animals for 6 months. Normal animal controls don't give flea prevention every single month. Normal animal controls don't try to network money to be able to try to do heartworm treatments for animals that are literally sitting there dying of heartworms. I mean we do amputations now because I don't have rescues to pull animals that need amputations. I mean we are doing so much more than what we are required and mandated to do based on state law. We are trying. If you look at the code for animal control, we are stray or straying dog control, rabies and impoundment, and our main purpose is rabies prevention for the county. We handle bite cases and impounding oof animals that are not up to date on rabies vaccinations, and owner education. That is what we are there for. We are, I mean at what point do it become an owners' responsibility to be responsible for their animal? Why does it always fall on animal control? We cannot be that for everybody. We cannot be; people who own animals have to be responsible for their animals. It should not be animal controls job to do that. We are here to educate people.

If you read the law, it literally says educate people on animal control. That is it. Its education on how to get your animals to not be straying, how to educate the people to own animals, but owners irresponsibility does not fall on animal control. So, as far as the rest of our report goes, we are doing the best we can obviously but we are struggling too. I mean we are struggling. Anything else from me that you might need.

Mr. Trentman: Whatcha got Eddie?

Eddie: How you doing? My name is Eddie Johnson and I am the warden that went out there to assess the situation. I have been working with animal control for 12 years. The problem was that that week that happened, the weather conditions were so bad, that we had humane cares everywhere in the county. I went out on the 10th, the animals in question, they were healthy. When I went out there at that time, there were no dead animals on the property. I tried to make contact with the owner. This is the normal practice that we do. We go out, assess the situation, then we try to make contact with the owner. I left a door hanger on the 10th, they didn't contact me back, I went back out on the 13th. Still no dead dogs on the property. The weather that week was just terrible. We had dogs dying in East Saint Louis, Washington Park because we cannot make owners take their dogs in the house. And I mean this is like, as much as we want to help everybody and help the situation, it was a bad situation, but if you all have worked with animals, their coats, they were kind of, they were not as bad as it was. The weather was the main thing, that was the problem, but that was everywhere, but the animals were being fed. Their coats were kind of healthy, there were a few of them that were a little straggly, but in that situation we had to make contact with the owner. We did go out there the year prior and we did have calls about that; me, Ms Jett, and 2 deputies went out there and accessed the situation. They had 13 animals at that time, the 2 brothers and that was it. So from that time last year, until now, I guess they just multiplied. The situation is just its one of those situations that I couldn't get the owner to contact me back. That was the problem.

Ashley: And mind you too, that contact we had, this was the first contact that weve had and it was almost one year to the date. So this call came in on the 10th and last years call came in on February 13th, 2024. In the interim of one year, we have not had any complaints or stray calls about them.

Sue: There was a call on the 2nd.

Ashley: I did not have a call on the 2nd, there was no report made on the 2nd.

Eddie: The report that was made, I got your message off the machine and I went out there first. When I went out there that day, there were no dead dogs on the property. I checked and I left a door hanger. Nobody contacted me, I went back out on the 13th, and took some videos of the animals running around. There were no dead dogs or dead animals on the property.

Sue: There is at least one picture of a dead cat or two dead and I think...

Ashley: As of the 13th?

Sue: Yes. I had called on the 14th.

Eddie: When I went out there, like I said it's a big property. No, I knocked. I don't know who called, I don't know if it was you or you but I went out there on the 10th and I went out there on the 13th. I inspected the property, there were no dead animals on the property.

Sue: I do know that a Sheriff's deputy did go out on the 2nd when Chris called in.

Ashley: So the sheriff's department doesn't transfer calls to us. So, if someone is not directly calling us, then we are not getting a call.

Sue: And respectfully, that may be something that could assist by avoiding a repeat. Just education to the sheriff's department on what to do because under the act they do have authority to act and they told me on the phone that they have no authority to act and I actually, on the Saturday I had to call back because they had not gone to see about the people and when the neighbors were concerned because they hadn't seen the people. One brother died January 7th and the other one is living with Mr. Massey. So, there was actually no one at the property. In this situation, by the time that there were people actually calling who had the rescue that said that they could take them and they are still being told there is nothing they could do, obviously capacity for someone to take them if someone would have made the executive decision and said yup go ahead and pull them. Other communities have humane investigators, they get tested by the state, Department of Agriculture, and they are allowed to act. I would suggest that might be something worth doing and having some of the police officers become humane investigators.

Mr. Trentman: Thank you for your comment. What else do you have Eddie?

Eddie: So, my other issue with that is that even if it is a situation you have to have somewhere to house the animals. That's really a lot of it.

Mr. Bishop: We didn't have a place to house the animals either.

Eddie: You guys are taking one situation, a horrible situation. I have to deal with the whole county. So, it's a little different for me than it is for you all.

Heather: We are not trying to say that we are trying to find a solution.

Eddie: I understand that, but you are all making this more important than the whole county. Not saying that you are downplaying it, but that week of weather the whole county was suffering, animals were dying because people wouldn't take them into the house. I was running from one end of the county to the other the whole week because of the weather. It's a horrible situation but you guys are highlighting this one situation like it's the only thing that was happening that week. I had dogs dying everywhere. I mean like it's a horrible situation but in the state that we are, we didn't really have anywhere to take the dogs, but it's a procedure that we have to do. I went out and tried to make contact with the owner. Our first situation is not just to take the animal. We try to rectify the situation. Taking the animals is the last thing to do. And like I said, it's just an unfortunate situation. It's a hard situation to deal with that we are dealing with right now. The animal situation is all over, not just here. It's East Saint Louis, O'Fallon, Fairview Heights, everyone has a situation and we have to deal with them and we have to find a way to deal with them that effective for us. So, if we would have took those dogs we would have been

full and then we would have had those dogs in cages and we wouldn't have been able to service the rest of the community, it's just a horrible situation. Like Ashley said, at what point does the owner have to become responsible for the animals? We are there to try to assist and try to educate but all of it cannot fall onto animal control.

Sue: Are you addressing me?

Eddie: No, no I' just looking at you because you are directly in front of me.

Sue: But you can cite the owners, if you can't find them then you can file a complaint against them and in this situation by February 13th, you did have these folks saying that there is something going on here and they would have been able to take the animals because they ultimately took the animals.

Ashley: But all of this happened over a weekend too. This was Friday evening, Saturday and the Sunday, into Monday which was a holiday and we were closed. He was on schedule to go back out on Tuesday to recheck the situation and possibly remove them but they were gone by then. Every time that Eddie was out there, those dogs came out from within the porched area. There was a hole where they were getting back into the porched area and then getting out. So, they never left the property while Eddie was there. They never followed him off the property, they never went to the street, we never had a straying report: I mean I seen pictures obviously and I know that they were down at the very end of the road but while: even talking to Stacy, an animal considered running at large, even if the animals is off of the property and runs back onto its property, while we there, we still do not have grounds for removal.

Sue: No one is suggesting that this is a case of running at large.

Ashley: But that is what reports that were called in.

Sue: We are suggesting that it was not the care that is required by section 3 of the act for food, adequate shelter, and water.

Ashley: Every call that we had to respond, even starting on the 10th was for running at large for the dogs being on Waterloo Rd, not for humane care.

Eddie: Right, and when I got there I assessed the situation as a humane care and tried to make contact with the owner. But the initial call that we had was for a dog in the road, so that's technically running at large. On the 10th, I did assess the situation, and that's what made it different. That's what I was saying when I went back on the 13th, I was still trying to contact the owner, but like she said if we still hadn't made contact, we were going to remove the dogs. It just happened quicker, but the weather was so cold that week and it was just.

Heather: And that's why we asked.

Ashley: Right.

Mr. Bishop: (inaudible) It was still cold enough that all the water was frozen, right?

Eddie: This was everywhere.

Mr. Bishop: I just want to make sure we are all on the same page.

(everyone speaking over each other; inaudible)

Mr. Trentman: Dawn, do you have anything from the adoption side? Any good news.

Dawn: Some of the news is like she was discussing. It's not like a highlighted, huge amount of adoptions but its more than it has been. Some of the other humane care cases that, from the beginning of the year that we discussed last month, and we were able to assist in, which was still a strategic operation that had to happen. Some of those dogs are now being adopted.

(inaudible). We have had quite a bit of calls, and people coming in to visit us, and some animals going home this week. You know, it's a ripple effect with everything. All the rescues are so full everywhere. Animals are not moving as quickly. We are trying to strategize different ways and how can we keep our kennel environment stay calm, cool, and collective as best you can by doing some spay & neuter on some animals that we can eventually adopt out of our animal control. I've been attending these meetings for a very long time. I started out coming as a St Clair County Animal Welfare Advocate sitting on the line just helping the community right with that lady down there. I would say that I am very proud to work for St Clair County. A lot of things are going in a positive direction under the direction we have now. And this whole situation we discussed tonight is very sad and it's very tragic and I think every single one of us are learning something about this and we all need to give each other a little bit of grace. It's a rough world.

Mr. Trentman: Ashley, as far as, who pulled animals this month, and what are our numbers.

Ashley: The humane society pulled a couple. Gateway Pet Guardians pulled a few. But there were, like I said, just 14 animals that left and went to rescue. 14 animals that left and went to rescue.

Mr. Trentman: Is that dogs and cats?

Ashley: Yes, dogs and cats. And I can tell you that it was 4 dogs and 10 cats. So, we have 4 dogs that leave in an entire month when you are used to having 80 plus to 100 plus leaving every single month out of the shelter it's a huge difference.

Mr. Trentman: Thank you.

MOTION: by Mr. Scott to approve Ashley's report. Second by Mr. Greenwald.

Vote: Yes: 6 No: 0 Motion Carried.

Mr. Trentman: Any other business to come before this board?

MOTION to adjourn by Mr. Greenwald. Second by Mr. O'Donnell

Vote: Yes: 6 No: 0 Motion carried.