

# San Francisco Animal Commission

## Meeting Minutes

### February 9, 2023

#### 1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Present: Michael Angelo Torres, Irina Ozernoy, Jane Tobin, Nina Irani, Brian Van Horn, Dr. Shari O'Neill, DVM/ACC, ACC Deputy Director Amy Corso

Absent: Commissioner - Iris Chan and Commissioner Annemarie Fortier. Christopher Campbell, SF RPD, Officer Greg Sutherland, SFPD

#### 2. General Public Comment

No public comment.

#### 3. Draft Minutes from January - Commission Approved

**4. Chairperson's and Commissioners' Reports** - Chairperson Torres reported as advised by the City Attorney to edit the letter of support for the proposed draft legislation for the e-collar shock ban, which was then edited to be forwarded to the Board of Supervisors.

Chairperson Torres also announced that Commissioner Fortier and Dr. Shari O'Neill will be leaving the commission. Both were thanked for their service to the community and the commission.

#### 5. New Business

##### Discussion with Ann Dunn [Discussion Item] [Commissioner Torres]

Director Dunn shared her experiences and challenges at Oakland Animal Services. For the purposes of this meeting, she limited her observations related to cats in Oakland. Intake increased over the years beyond the tipping point. In the last 10 years, intake increased by over 63%.

**Problem** - shortage of Veterinarians and Vet Techs, therefore a shortage of spay/neuter services to keep up with exploding population. And it will only get worse.

*Re: Community cats* - extremely difficult to know which cat needs intervention. The community is bringing in cats that may belong to someone. This is not always the case, but often times the cats already have homes and need intervention. So, a nuanced policy is needed.

*Kittens* - underage kittens are medically fragile and bringing them in could put them at risk. If they are not of the age that they can eat on their own, the kittens require intensive care. The recommendation is to leave the kittens and observe if the mother returns. The alternative of bringing them into the shelter could be worse.

*Re: Older kittens* - can be socialized but it takes time and resources. OAK increased the number of foster homes, but most people don't have the skills to foster older kittens. Cat Town put the older kittens with other socialized cats. While it worked for some, it did not work for all kittens. For kittens that come in 3-6 months old and are not socialized, the OAS policy is now TNR or relocate because intake exceeds capacity. Director Dunn stated this is an unfortunate choice. Although OAS is not euthanizing for space Director Dunn acknowledged there is no perfect choice and growing up in the shelter is a worse outcome. OAS is in triage mode, meaning doing the best it can do with the resources they have.

Director Dunn also acknowledged the emotional piece of this discussion but argues that the decisions must be based on what is the best outcome when there are limited resources.

Director Dunn - If you can control your intake, you can control your outcomes. At an Open Admission shelter, you can't control it. The animals keep coming. Their solution is to work with community partners trying to solve the issue.

Meet monthly with their four community partners - all one part of the community to solve the problem together. Be strategic with resources. All with a mission to support each other - all the partners involved.

When options are imperfect, there are challenges and difficulties to overcome. Lack of resources and not being able to solve the problem. These are good people at the shelter working with a broken system. Often the staff is blamed by the public. Instead, the public should supplement the good work of OAS, which was struggling with resources.

### **Commissioners' Questions/Comments**

Chair Torres asked thanked Director Dunn for the community-based collaboration approach. He asked about the monthly meetings with cats and if OAS has that same approach for other animals. Director Dunn noted it is just cats now. She noted she wanted to work through the intake policy first and also was able to organize it because of her previous community cat experience.

Chair Torres asked about how Dir Dunn deals with ongoing discussions with partners. Dir Dunn noted the conversations are fluid and ongoing at virtual meetings attended by relevant staff of OAS and partnering organizations.

Friends of OAS (FOAS) has funded a Community Cat Coordinator that helps with relocation and spay/neutering. FOAS also funded a Working Cat Program person that serves as a single point of contact for assessing the needs of a particular cat's situation, as a blanket intake policy, although essential, does not always apply.

Chair Torres asked about underserved communities. Director Dunn responded that she sees OAS as a human service agency keeping pets with their people. There is racial inequality. OAS wants to help underserved communities. However, she noted animal welfare operates at the intersection of white privilege and systemic racism. Director Dunn stated we have a deep history in animal welfare of mistreating people who are experiencing poverty and OAS is trying to be proactive in supporting people.

Commissioner Van Horn - in comparing public and non-profit institutions how many animals are coming through, and what is the operating budget? Director Dunn - Cat Town - served around 300 cats annually on a budget of \$750K.

Commissioner Tobin - Since we are in crisis mode - how to beef up the s/n vet medical field to deal with the crisis? Director Dunn had no answer to date. Commissioner Van Horn concurred. Offered to make it a point to address this issue with SFVMA. Lack of support staff is an issue. Vets need vet techs.

Commissioner Ozernoy - Asked about the pandemic and post-pandemic impact on Cat Town and OAS. DD things quieted down some and gave time to start some new programs which helped reduce dogs in the shelter and reduced the euthanasia rate. Now that Covid relief money is gone, OAS sees many who surrender pets because they lost housing.

### **Public Comment**

Two ideas - One Caller suggested spay/neuter from vet schools similar to a Peace Corps program. Also recommended, since ACC rarely uses its dental suite, it should be temporarily converted to a S/N clinic and have the vets help at ACC.

One caller noted that ACC is not working with community partners as effectively.

Another comment on the restrictions of those other than veterinarians being able to offer vet services Another caller mentioned the cost of supporting the community cats is extraordinary. Can we sponsor to help the people who are helping these community cats?

Chair Torres - asked Director Dunn about the 50 Dogs in 5 Days campaign at OAS - trying to address the difficulty of adopting large dogs. Pet-friendly housing has restrictions on the size of dogs. Because of space issues, OAS decided to share with volunteers that may need to euthanize for space. OAS

asked volunteers to use their own networks to reach their networks. The volunteers and staff launched the 50 Dogs in 5 Days. The outcome - 90 Dogs in 5 Days.

Commissioner Van Horn - talked about the cost challenges of mobile clinics and also the time it takes for new student veterinarian techs to do surgeries. Also, he noted ACC needs support staff, so using their facilities can't happen until they hire more staff.

Commissioner Tobin asked about the possibility of appealing to retired veterinarians for help.

Commissioner Van Horn noted that as newly appointed president of SFVMA he will make urgent pleas.

## **6. Old Business**

### **Reporting from Animal Care & Control [Discussion Item] [Commissioner Torres and Dr. O'Neill]**

Dr. O'Neill shared the daily numbers of the animals at the shelter. The dog population is very high, as is the guinea pigs population.

ACC hosted a successful food bank event sponsored by Full Belly Bus. This will be a regular event on the second Wednesday of every month.

ACC is gearing up for a kitten foster program and training.

*Hiring updates* - Front desk is fully staffed. ACO's down two spots, ACA's - down 5 spots. Foster Coordinator job was posted and closed. Still no contract for after-hours care. ACO's triaging these cases. Grant not re-upped for specialty emergency services. Working on a new partnership with the shelter's database and Pawboost.

Dr. O'Neill shared the SF ACC Quarterly Report and the new SF ACC Cat Data Report.

Dr. O'Neill shared some parting words on her commission work and the work of the commission.

### **Public Comment**

More comments for ACC to engage with the community.

Comments about the rabies situation and not requiring euthanasia of bats.

**B. Commission Governance [Discussion/Action Item] [Commissioners Tobin and Torres]** The Commission will discuss current plans to resume in-person meetings at City Hall beginning on March 1st.

Chair Torres - shared that the commission is required to meet in person. March 9th is our first in-person meeting. Panelists can present remotely. Unsure about the remote public comment but not sure of the technology for supporting hybrid meetings.

## **7. Items to be put on the agenda for future Commission meetings**

- The next meeting will be held in Room 408 at City Hall on Thursday, March 9, 2023.
- Presentation by Ingrid Russell from the SF Zoo and Gardens on conservation efforts
- Discussion on possible recommendations for ACC

## **8. Adjournment** - Approx. 7:40 pm