

TCCOG/SPCA Special Meeting October 16, 2007

Present

TCCOG: Don Barber-Town of Caroline, Doug Austic-Town of Ulysses, Cathy Valentino-Town of Ithaca, Ric Dietrich-Town of Danby, Steve Thayer-City of Ithaca, and Mary Ann Sumner-Town of Dryden.

TCSPCA Board: Bob O'Brien-Chair, Polley McClure-Secretary, Joe McAfee-Treasurer and Abigail Smith-Director

Meeting began at 9 a.m.
Introductions were made.

Information shared:

TCCOG held a special meeting last Friday, with 10 municipalities represented, to discuss the animal control contract fees from the SPCA, which doubled for 2008. A sub-committee was formed to visit the issue of the animal control contract fees with the SPCA. Today's meeting was convened for the purpose of collaborating with the SPCA on best way to move ahead with the contracts. From the municipality stand point there are two major concerns to be addressed:

1. Municipal supervisors, TCCOG members, have a fiduciary responsibility to their boards to achieve an understanding of what contract fees are, acquire the facts that support said fees, and convey that information to board members who then decide on an action, and
2. The information dissemination could have been done in a more timely fashion. Municipalities may not have the funds available for the increase without increasing taxes AND there is not ample time to acquire alternatives for animal control by the first of the year.

The TCSPCA and County Municipalities have shared a cozy relationship for the past few years. Both sides have let things slide: the SPCA has only requested gradual increases in fees, and the municipalities need a better understanding of what animal control requires. TCCOG would like to propose a contract for animal control through the SPCA for January through June of 2008 at fifty percent of the increase requested by SPCA. Between now and January 2008 TCCOG will compile more comprehensive information regarding animal control from the SPCA, contiguous counties, Ag and Markets, etc. Once fortified with more knowledge, TCCOG would like to either continue to contract with SPCA for animal control and/or produce an RFP for countywide animal control, inviting the SPCA to respond.

The TCSPCA has been surviving on reserve funds for many years. If the municipalities cannot pay the increased fees, the SPCA will not be able to provide animal control. The SPCA has separate contracts for Animal Control and Not-for-profit Services. They are at a juncture where they cannot continue to financially support animal control. The Tompkins County SPCA has one of the best animal control districts in the Country. Most humane societies do not cover

animal control; it is covered by separate entities, such as local police departments and private or county run organizations. The SPCA Board members met last night to discuss this situation and also considered a six-month contract, however, they will need to receive the proposed fee. The SPCA has a choice in providing animal control but is happy to maintain the current status as long as costs are covered. This should not be just a budgetary item. The TCSPCA can stick to the minimal requirements but feel that they should continue to provide the same quality of service. Fees charged cover infrastructure costs as well as per animal service. Actually, the bulk of the contract fee covers the availability of the service. When a stray is brought to the SPCA they are licensed, and vaccinated as needed. The SPCA Board members applaud the idea of municipalities researching an equitable way to provide this service. Ms. Smith disseminated numeric information on the 2007 Animal Control Operations of the SPCA and a copy of the TCSPCA Animal Control Contract. She stated that the animal control budget, \$395,412, is third of the entire SPCA budget of \$1,060,000. Approximately \$45,000 is still being subsidized, which they plan to phase-in in the near future.

Key Topics:

- There seems to be a gap between what SPCA provides and what Ag & Markets requires.
- Cats are not covered under Ag & Markets, yet municipalities are being charged for cat “control”. Only licensed animals are covered under Ag & Market Laws.
- Feral cat control and rabies vaccinations are something contracted for through the County. Basically, the feral cat program is a donation from Tompkins County. What happens if the County decides not to fund this service? Where do the other municipalities stand with contract fees?
- What happens to fees if there is not 100 per cent participation from county municipalities?
- How is the rate per municipality decided?
- How are SPCA policies derived?
- TCCOG needs to do a comparative cost analysis with similar Counties in NYS.
- Town Clerks are troubled that some of the administrative burden has been shifted away from the SPCA and yet fees are increasing.
- Are surrendered stray dog fees covered under the contract?
- How often does the SPCA go to the municipalities to pick-up stray dogs?
- Should each town have its own shelter? Should we look into a County Shelter?
- Can the County provide a shelter that is municipality funded and have a partnership with the SPCA? (This is something long term.)

Another venue for local municipalities and the SPCA to collaborate efforts on would be to ask the State for changes to its laws.

Next Steps:

SPCA to provide financial information to TCCOG:

Audited financial statements for the last three years

The 990 tax forms only if financial audits are not available

Budgets for the last three years

Current year activity to date

A three-year financial activity report for the next three years (including rates projected for local governments).

Cost and revenue allocation for both the animal control activity and the prevention control activity.

The financial audits may have all the items requested except for current year budgets and future budget plans.

TCCOG to contact the following organizations for information:

NYS Agriculture and Markets representative

Communities such as; Binghamton, Elmira, Horseheads, and Cortland regarding their Animal Control process/programs.

Review financial information provided by TCSPCA.

Next TCCOG sub-committee meeting will be on Friday, October 19th at 9 a.m. in Supervisor Valentino's office at the Ithaca Town Hall, 215 N. Tioga St., Ithaca.

Next TCCOG/SPCA meeting will be on Tuesday, October 23rd at 9 a.m. in the Aurora Room at the Ithaca Town Hall, 215 N. Tioga St., Ithaca.

Meeting adjourned at 10:15 am