



Group wants animal shelter to run a no-kill facility

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CATS AND DOGS—Monica Nolan, director of the Ventura County Animal Shelter, speaks about the responsibility of pet owners and breeders to help curb the number of abandoned pets brought to the shelter during a meeting of the Animal Regulation Commission at the shelter on Jan. 26 in Camarillo. The commission addressed a standing-room-only crowd of county residents who want to make the Camarillo facility a no-kill shelter.

More

than 100 pet rescue advocates rallied at the Camarillo Animal Shelter last week, calling for the county shelter to embrace the no-kill philosophy and quit using euthanasia as a means for population control.



NO ROOM INSIDE—Due to the lack of seating inside the Animal Regulation Commission’s meeting at the Ventura County Animal Shelter in Camarillo on Jan. 26, residents stand outside the building and listen to the proceedings.

The

crowd was so large Jan. 26 that it couldn’t fit inside the small boardroom where the Ventura County Animal Services commission meets. Most of the no-kill supporters stood in the courtyard in the sun, listening in—often over the barking of shelter dogs—as about a dozen of their counterparts made pleas to the commission.

Animal rescuer DeAnna Shaneck couldn’t help getting emotional when addressing the panel of city leaders.

“Each one of those numbers in the statistics that are in your packet today (was a) beating heart,” said Shaneck, who works with Tiny Loving Canines (TLC), a smalldog breed rescue based out of Simi Valley and Moorpark.

“Give the public an opportunity to foster your animals,” she said, adding to a list of requests other rescuers made during the meeting. “But most of all I want to tell you to stop giving them the needle.”

Speaking on behalf of her fellow animal activists, Camarillo resident and attorney Diane Rowley made a presentation to the commission voicing the rescue community’s concerns and ideas.

Rowley is the founder of Promote and Protect Animals (PAPA), an alliance of rescue groups, including TLC, dedicated to lowering the kill rates in Ventura County.

She outlined a three-pronged approach to lowering the kill rate, the first step being improved marketing.

“If you were going to go buy a car and all you knew about it was that it was a blue Chevy, I don’t think anyone in this room would buy that car,” Rowley said. “By the same token, as a rescue, I don’t know that there is anyone who will come (for) or commit to a female tan Chihuahua.”

She said the shelter should post on its website for each animal an age estimate, weight, details on temperament and any medical issues, as well as a photo and video, so potential adopters and rescues can effectively shop online.

Second, she said every dog coming in should receive a vaccination against kennel cough since a sick dog is less desirable to adopt. Rowley said the vaccine is quick and easy to administer, and costs \$2 to \$3 per animal.

The third step toward lowering the kill rate would be to increase communal housing of the small dogs. Rowley said penning compatible animals would not only create more space at the shelter but would also reduce dogs' stress and enhance their quality of life by giving them companions.

While Rowley argued that additional space could be created at the Camarillo shelter, she also said there's available space at the Simi Valley holding facility, from which animals are not adopted out. Rowley said there were 36 open cat kennels and 26 open dog runs.

"We are euthanizing cats and dogs here when there is empty space there."

No-kill takes collaboration

Built in 1985, the Camarillo shelter can house about 400 animals.

During fiscal year 2009-10, the shelter took in 6,987 dogs and 3,426 cats. Of those, 2,060 dogs and 2,183 cats were destroyed.

Monica Nolan, shelter director for the past three years, said overcrowding is the No. 1 cause of euthanasia of adoptable pets. So while she supports moving the shelter "toward zero," she's an advocate of the approach taken by a rescue organization called Maddie's Fund.

"Maddie's Fund's philosophy is the only way that you can build no-kill shelters is by building no-kill communities," Nolan said. "And that's because you can't put the blame on any one agency and put the work on any one agency. Everybody has to work together."

Tressa Lucas, an independent animal advocate, agreed.

"We all want the same thing. We don't want to see animals put down," she said. "I am in agreement that this has to be community participation."

Nolan said information sent out by the rescue groups noting that 50 to 100 adoptable dogs were killed each week is "erroneous." The shelter's 31 percent euthanasia rate represents both healthy and unhealthy dogs, but no-kill organizations don't consider the euthanasia of unhealthy, untreatable animals as killings.

When looking at the numbers from no-kill standards, the euthanasia rate for adoptable dogs is 16 percent, Nolan said.

In addition, while the kill rate has remained the same since she became director, the number of dogs has risen 17 percent from 2009 to 2011, resulting in an ever-increasing number to house.

"And yes, there are mistakes because the staff here doesn't have all the resources," Nolan said. "We are struggling as much as we can and we've reached our capacity of care."

Nolan agreed that the website needs more information and said improvements are already being made in the intake area. Still, she said, the resources aren't there to make it a "home shopping network."

As for vaccines, Nolan said the shelter vaccinates for lifethreatening illnesses like distemper and that the Bordetella, or kennel cough, vaccine only covers upper respiratory infections. She said its use would be a budget consideration because the vaccine would cost an additional \$10,000 to \$12,000 a year.

Camarillo Councilmember Kevin Kildee, chair of the VCAS Commission, suggested that the commissioners take the item back to their respective cities to see if they would be willing to chip in to cover the cost of the Bordetella vaccine.

"Perhaps for a relatively small amount of money we can implement that," Kildee said.

On Rowley's final point, Nolan said the shelter does pen certain animals together but doesn't bond dogs when they first come in because they are stressed and susceptible to disease. The shelter also doesn't bond bite quarantines, isolation animals, bully breeds, owner holds or confiscated animals.

Nolan said the road to no-kill begins with preventing animals from coming to the shelter in the first place, and that responsibility lies with pet owners.

County Supervisor Steve Bennett said many positive changes have taken place since Nolan came on board but acknowledged there's room for improvement.

"I think we all know we need to do better," Bennett said. "Certainly the issue of getting all the way to no-kill is a combination of things to do, but also there will be funding issues associated with that and the cities will have to keep that in mind, of funding their fair share."

"My goal and I think everybody's goal is to get us to nokill," he added.

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