



RiverheadPatch

GOVERNMENT

Letters Show Euthanized Dog Showed "Great Improvement" Before Being Put Down by Town

Euthanasia policies at town animal shelter called into question.

By **Joseph Pinciario** January 5, 2011

The Town of Riverhead's "urgent" decision to euthanize a pitbull in December has called into question the town's animal euthanasia policy and, from some, the competence of those enacting it.

Bruno, a five-year old pitbull who was surrendered to the town on Oct. 7, was euthanized on Dec. 21 despite pleas from several members of the Animal Advisory Committee – including Town Board liaison Councilman Jim Wooten – to hold off until the board could review its euthanasia policy.

At the meeting, Police Chief David Hegermiller, whose department runs the animal shelter, said euthanizing the dog was "urgent." When asked by Wooten why, since the dog had spent 12 weeks in isolation, its killing was urgent, Hegermiller would not elaborate.

Bruno was euthanized before 8 a.m. the next day.

However, a letter from animal control officer Louis Coronesi to the police department less than a week before shows Bruno may not have been enough of a threat to put down.

"The staff has worked with this dog and the animal is showing great improvement," Coronesi wrote to Sergeant Sean Egan, Coronesi's superior in the department, on Dec. 15. "I would like to have the dog worked by a select few volunteers that I feel are capable."

The next day, on Dec. 16, Coronesi filed a euthanasia form for Bruno.

"The dog has made improvements in temperament, however, due to the documented bite, size and strength of the dog, in my opinion this dog should be humanely euthanized," Coronesi wrote in the report.

After being surrendered at the beginning of October, Bruno lived in isolation until he was euthanized.

According to the town's euthanasia policy, adopted by the town on Nov. 15, 2005, "the questionable animal must be deemed aggressive and beyond rehabilitation," by both an animal control officer and an authorized veterinarian.

Coronesi's documentation of Bruno's "great improvement" suggests he was not beyond rehabilitation. However that decision was left to Coronesi and Dr. Richard Hanusch of Aquebogue Veterinary Hospital, and both called for Bruno to be put down.

Coronesi, when asked to comment on the matter, declined.

Supervisor Sean Walter said the town followed its existing protocol.

"We have a policy, which states that an animal control officer and veterinarian both must agree when a dog must be put down," he said. "We followed that policy."

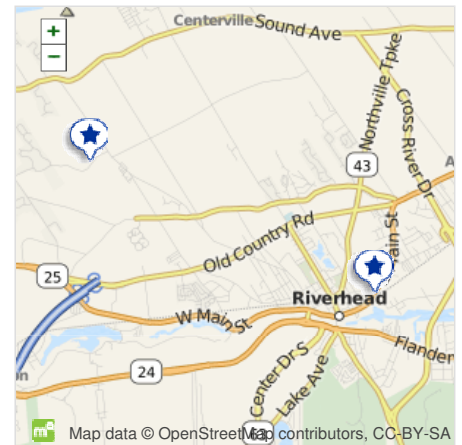
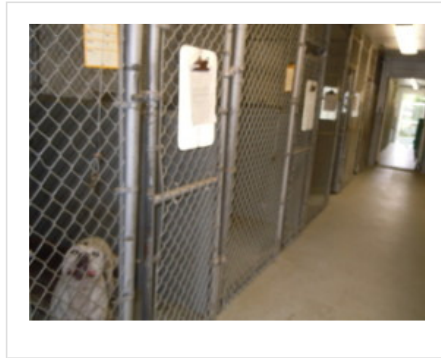
When Bruno was surrendered, his prior owner had not informed the town of a bite history. However Wooten said the town was informed soon after by the Suffolk County Health Department that Bruno had bitten 22-year old Justin Schottler on Oct. 5. Walter, at a Dec. 21 town board meeting, incorrectly stated more than once that Bruno "bit a child."

Walter would not comment on Coronesi's letters first asking for permission to help Bruno, then asking for permission to euthanize him.

"I'm not getting into the he-said, she-said," said Walter.

At Tuesday's town board meeting, Pat Lynch, a volunteer at the shelter, brought Coronesi's criminal record into question, adding that the charges make him unfit for someone in charge of euthanizing animals.

According to the Arizona Game and Fish Commission record, Coronesi was found guilty in February 2004 (http://docs.google.com/viewer?at=v&q=cache:XNLn_K6_Gz0J:www.azgfd.gov/pdfs/inside_azgfd/minutes/2004/revocations/CA2004Feb.pdf+louis+coronesi&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=AF-3h8gpt9KhEboeorYwgjZI4UNv4lrm1Cum08Ah90-6_29y1AaFsAZ58DGonLl-dmSGM9YNFwCgm5cKR--)



z7BpF219s5ahNjbf2rJXBgBIu8BhREKE6Ksm54koT81Jh_fZN&sig=AHIEtbTTaqz4jw_34AOA_8njKjMsbrH5dg) of the following counts and charged a total of \$775:

- Taking wildlife (reptiles) without a license
- Possessing wildlife (diamondback rattlesnake) unlawfully taken
- Taking wildlife (Gila monster) during closed season
- Possessing restricted live wildlife (Gila monster)

The Animal Advisory Committee will meet again on Jan. 10 to hold a special meeting on the town's euthanasia policy. Councilman Wooten said he has been researching the euthanasia policies at other municipalities and hopes to change Riverhead's.

John Stefans and Ashley Wilbourn contributed to this article.

Do you think the town's euthanasia policy should be changed? Tell us in the comments.

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COMMENTS (2)



Jerry Cimisi

1:03pm on Thursday, January 6, 2011

Great article. One cannot help but wonder: did Coronesi's apparent about face result from some higher up pressure about revealing his criminal past?

Jerry Cimisi, Rocky Point

Brenda Brownley

10:10am on Friday, January 7, 2011

That gentleman (?) has no business being in control of anything. Maybe he should be put down!