

RiverheadPatch



Four-Legged and Furry

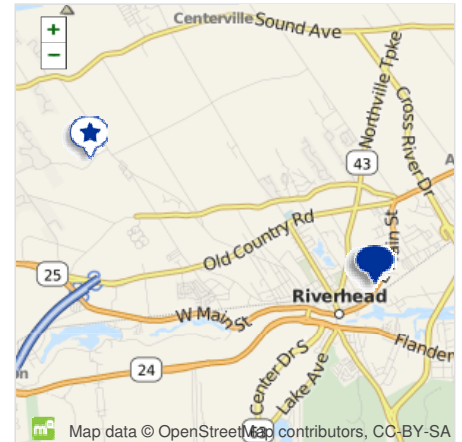
By **Ashley Wilbourn** January 9, 2011

OPINION

Opinion: Euthanasia and the Riverhead Town Animal Shelter

The euthanization of Bruno at the Riverhead Town Animal Shelter raises questions regarding the town's policy and its implementation. The concept of "humanely destroying" an animal raises a lot of questions. How do you "humanely destroy" a pet? When is it appropriate? Who makes the decision?

In Riverhead, euthanasia is a topic that has haunted not only the animal shelter but also town hall. In the last six months alone the topic has been raised numerous times. In October, town supervisor Sean Walter was quoted as saying a dog at the town animal shelter should be euthanized after six months (<http://riverhead.patch.com/articles/pick-of-the-litter-leaves-pit-bulls-behind>).



After immediate criticism, Walter retracted his statements and [pledged to raise awareness](http://riverhead.patch.com/articles/town-hall-notes-walter-starts-awareness-campaign-for-dogs-riverhead-resorts-partner-expected-soon) (<http://riverhead.patch.com/articles/town-hall-notes-walter-starts-awareness-campaign-for-dogs-riverhead-resorts-partner-expected-soon>) of the shelter and the dogs housed there. In an interview I held with Walter, the supervisor committed to publicizing the shelter and [bringing dogs from the shelter to town board meetings each week](http://riverhead.patch.com/articles/a-conversation-with-sean-walter-the-riverhead-animal-shelter) (<http://riverhead.patch.com/articles/a-conversation-with-sean-walter-the-riverhead-animal-shelter>). Since this pledge, dogs have been brought to town board meetings on two occasions.

This week a new cloud covered town hall and the shelter as [the story of Bruno](http://riverhead.patch.com/articles/letters-show-euthanized-dog-showed-great-improvement-before-being-put-down-by-town) (<http://riverhead.patch.com/articles/letters-show-euthanized-dog-showed-great-improvement-before-being-put-down-by-town>) emerged. Bruno, a five year-old American Staffordshire Terrier was held in isolation at the town animal shelter from the time he was surrendered on Oct. 7 to the time he was euthanized on Dec. 21.

In the aftermath of Bruno's death, Walter claimed that Bruno bit a child, that town protocol was followed exactly and that there was no reason to question animal control officer Lou Coronesi – who requested Bruno's euthanization - despite his judgment being brought into question due to a past criminal history involving animals.

But the fact that Bruno's bite history report shows no evidence of his biting a child brings into question Walter's knowledge of Bruno's case, and if the supervisor is not knowledgeable about the case, than how can he know that Coronesi's decision to euthanize the animal was the right one?

Walter's response and Coronesi's decision to euthanize seems particularly questionable in light of a December 15 document where Coronesi states that Bruno was "showing great improvement (<http://riverhead.patch.com/articles/letters-show-euthanized-dog-showed-great-improvement-before-being-put-down-by-town>)", only one day prior to his filing a request for Bruno to be destroyed.

We will never live in a world where an animal will not be euthanized, and if we are fair to ourselves and to the animals, we must realize that in some cases, animals must be euthanized. I hold with the [ASPCA's statement on euthanasia](http://www.aspc.org/about-us/policy-positions/euthanasia.aspx) (<http://www.aspc.org/about-us/policy-positions/euthanasia.aspx>): "Euthanasia must be understood for what it is: a last-step, end-of-the-road option to spare animals further hardship and suffering."

In the case of Bruno, it is apparent that in his last months he suffered. He lived in isolation from the time he was turned over to the town. But was the isolation necessary? Was the suffering caused by this isolation necessary?

A 2007 [study conducted by the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/11/071114121316.htm) (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/11/071114121316.htm>) found that isolation can cause a range of psychological effects in humans and animals, including aggression. Bruno's evaluation by Dr. Hanusch cited his aggression as the determining factor in his being euthanized. However, Bruno was taken directly from isolation to his evaluation. Had he been given time outside of isolation, is it possible Bruno would not have showed the same signs of aggression? Is it possible he would be alive today?

We will never know because Bruno was never given that chance, and that is what is particularly upsetting about this case. After appropriate care from the animal shelter including an attempt at rehabilitation due to his documented bite history, Bruno might still have been deemed as aggressive and unsafe. Although it would have of course been upsetting to know that he had been euthanized, at least we would have known he was given a chance.

Instead, residents of Riverhead are left with the unsettling knowledge that a dog that was one day listed as "showing great improvement" and was the next day deemed too aggressive to live. We are left knowing that our supervisor is willing to defend the destruction of a living thing without full comprehension of whether that animal deserved to die and that one of the two people making the decision of whether or not to euthanize has a criminal history with animals.

Supervisor Walter said that the town's euthanasia policy was followed "to the letter" in Bruno's case. If leaving a dog in isolation for over two months and then euthanizing him one day after he was said to be "showing great improvements" is our town's policy, then what does the future hold for the remaining animals at the shelter?

Do you think protocol was followed in the case of Bruno? What do you think should be done in regards to the town's policy on euthanasia? [Tell us in the comments.](#)

Interested in a follow-up to this article?

About this column: 'Four-Legged and Furry' will focus on the smaller, cuter animals we interact with - and sometimes overlook - on a daily basis. In addition to showcasing adoptable animals and local rescue organizations, 'Four-Legged and Furry' will post fun and interactive activities you can do with your pets.

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