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## Town pursues privatization at animal shelter, even as it courts former ACO to return

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What's next for the Riverhead Town Animal Shelter now that controversial Control Officer Lou Coronesi has resigned?

Riverhead Town officials are talking with the former second-in-command, McCabe about transferring back to that position from his current job in the district — a post he took when the the Town Board cut his ACO job from the last year.

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At the same time, board members are still exploring the possibility of private shelter operation.

Councilman James Wooten has had discussions with the North Fork Anir League about running Riverhead's shelter. The NFAWL runs Southold's private-public partnership Wooten called very successful.

"But the talks are in very, very preliminary stages and it's really premature to be discussing this publicly," Wooten said this afternoon, after Supervisor Walter brought it up at the Town Board work session this morning.

Police Chief David Hegermiller was at the board's meeting agenda today having an animal adoption day to coincide with the Riverhead Country Fair.

"They are very interested in moving forward," Walter said of the Southold non-profit NFAWL.

NFAWL could not be reached for comment.

Walter said he wasn't sure whether the town would have put out an RFP in order to move forward with a deal that would have NFAWL take over the shelter operation.



The town has twice issued an RFP in its quest to privatize the shelter and twice RSVP, a nonprofit organization whose volunteers at the Riverhead shelter were often at odds with former ACO Coronese, was the only entity to submit a proposal. Wooten, the Town Board's liaison to the shelter told Riverhead last year he did not believe RSVP had the resources or experience to run the shelter.

Walter and Wooten both say they are very interested in a contractual arrangement that would allow a private entity to run the shelter.

Walter said Southold is paying NFAWL about as much as Riverhead has for its shelter operation, "if you back out the cost of building maintenance and upkeep," he said.

"I'd be very happy to just sign my name on the bottom of a check and give them," the supervisor said. "They'll do a better job."

In Southold, NFAWL provides animal control services, too. The organization is willing to take that function on in Riverhead, as well. Contracting that could pose a problem with the town's labor union, however, Wooten said.

Wooten said he and the supervisor were scheduled to meet with Pultz again next week "to really talk numbers."

But continued talk of privatizing the shelter has stalled bringing McCabe back to his former job.