

## Riverhead plans to use gas chamber to kill sick raccoons, end practice of 'clubbing'

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As they have at every Town Board meeting since the beginning of the year, animal rights activists attended yesterday's meeting to demand the removal of animal control officer Lou Coronese. And yesterday, the advocates got the same response from Supervisor Sean Walter: We're working on it.

But yesterday's meeting took a different turn when the subject turned from dogs to raccoons.

Sue Hansen of Rocky Point asked why the town euthanizes sick raccoons by clubbing them to death.

Councilman James Wooten, the Town Board's animal shelter/animal control liaison, acknowledged the town has been clubbing sick raccoons to kill them and said clubbing was an acceptable practice according to the Suffolk County health department.

The clubbing will stop, however, Wooten said. The town has ordered a carbon dioxide chamber to use to gas sick raccoons, and was waiting for it to be delivered, according to the councilman. Health department policy lists the gas as a preferred method of euthanizing sick animals, Wooten said.

That's where the meeting took an unusual turn.

While Connie Farr of Calverton was at the podium, making her point that sick raccoons don't necessarily need to be euthanized, Riverhead resident Sandra Mott began shouting at the Town Board from a seat in the back row of the meeting room.

The supervisor did nothing to stop the outburst or call the meeting back to order, as his colleague and political rival — Wooten announced last month his intention to challenge Walter for the Republican nomination for supervisor — attempted to answer the questions and heckling.

Afterward, Walter said Wooten had criticized him for how he treats people at Town Board meetings, so he decided to keep quiet and let Wooten handle the outburst himself.

Wooten defended the need to euthanize sick raccoons and also the town's intention to use a carbon dioxide chamber to put the animals down.

Canine distemper in [raccoons](#) is a common disease and usually fatal, according to the N.Y. State Department of Environmental Conservation. It can be transmitted to dogs that have not been inoculated against the virus, but it cannot be transmitted to humans. Rabies in raccoons is also widespread, according to the DEC. Symptoms of rabies and canine distemper in raccoons are similar: disorientation and seizures are common. Raccoons can also become sick with feline distemper, according to the DEC.