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## Riverhead mulls shipping shelter dogs to Brookhaven

By [Tim Gannon](#) | February 28, 2011 in [News](#), [Uncategorized](#)



3

Riverhead Town officials are looking into the possibility of no longer sheltering dogs in its Youngs Avenue pound and instead sending those dogs to Brookhaven Town's municipal shelter, according to Riverhead Police Chief David Hegermiller, whose department oversees the local shelter.

For years, town officials have discussed the possibility of separating the animal control function from shelter operations so that the responsibility for maintaining the shelter and getting dogs adopted would not rest with the animal control officers.

The chief briefly brought up the topic of sending the town's dogs to Brookhaven Town's shelter in Yaphank "as a cost-saving measure" during a meeting of the town's Animal Shelter Advisory Committee Monday.

But committee members voiced strong opposition to the proposal.

"No way," said committee member Connie Farr. "If I lose little Fluffy and I have to go to Brookhaven to retrieve my dog and I live in Riverhead and I paid all my taxes, I would be very [angry]."

"Are we talking about just the dogs that now belong to us, and not the ones we're picking up off the street...?" asked the committee's chairperson, Noreen LeCann.

"We're talking about not housing dogs," the chief responded.

"At all?" Ms. LeCann asked.

"At all," Chief Hegermiller said.

Dogs kept at the shelter are usually either dogs picked up as strays or dogs surrendered by their owners.

Statistics from the Riverhead Police Department indicate that in 2010, the town impounded 155 dogs. In addition, 54 dogs were surrendered and seven more were either found dead after car accidents or brought in dead by owners for cremations. The town got 105 dogs adopted and 98 dogs — including the dogs found dead in the streets — were returned to their owners, and 13 were cremated. Of the 13 cremated dogs, eight dogs had been euthanized.

Chief Hegermiller said six of those eight dogs were euthanized for health reasons, leaving only two dogs having been put down because they were deemed unadoptable by shelter officials.

The town currently has about 18 dogs in its shelter.

Committee members said the Brookhaven shelter is overcrowded itself, as evidence by a recent proposal by Brookhaven Supervisor Mark Lesko to pay animal rescue organizations \$250 for each pit bull they adopt from the town shelter. Like most municipal shelters, most of the dogs in Brookhaven's shelter are pit bulls.

The chief said the proposed move is about consolidation, much like consolidation is talked about with school districts.

"People love dogs," Ms. Farr said. "And to be politically correct and smart, this town would be dog friendly and they would have a nice shelter and they would have everyone happy here."

She said the current shelter smells because it's surrounded by a landfill, a sanitation company's hub and the town's deer cemetery, and that there are giant rats that come into the shelter and get killed by the dogs.

The chief said the idea of sending Riverhead's dogs to Brookhaven's shelter — for a price, of course — is being discussed, but that no final decision has been made.

Supervisor Sean Walter said on Friday that he hopes to have a solution to the animal shelter problems within 30 days, but he wouldn't say what that solution might be.

"I'm working on some things and hopefully in the next month, we'll have an answer," he said.

He acknowledged that last Tuesday he called Rex Farr, Connie's husband and a vocal critic of the current shelter, and asked for a 30-day grace period by which to solve the shelter problems.

Mr. Farr insisted any solution would have to include removing animal control officer Lou Coronesi, who has clashed with shelter volunteers and who recently came under fire for previous animal crime convictions and his handling of a case involving a pit bull named Bruno that was euthanized in December.

“I didn’t propose that idea,” Mr. Walter said when asked about the previously expected move Mr. Coronesi out of the shelter position and into another town position. “But we have taken appropriate actions with Lou and that’s a personnel issue and I can’t go further than that.”

“Other things probably will happen in the not-so distance future if I’m successful,” the supervisor added.

Councilman Jim Wooten, who is the Town Board’s liaison to the shelter advisory committee, said he thinks Mr. Coronesi should be moved to another position and that the town should work more cooperatively with volunteers at the shelter.

*tgannon@timesreview.com*

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Perhaps the solution is to ship Sean Walter and Joke of a Police Chief to Brookhaven instead.

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All this needs is some creative thinking from people. Making calls to local low/no kill rescue groups and breed rescues groups could possibly yield some alternative housing for these dogs AND develop a relationship between the organizations for any future animals that come in. Shipping RIVERHEAD dogs to BROOKHAVEN is ridiculous. They have the same issues in Brookhaven that Riverhead has - over crowding, low adoption rate, heavy bully breed population. I worked in a shelter environment for years and I'm very familiar with the struggles of sheltering animals - but it just sounds like everyone is giving up on the animals here.

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