

Send Riverhead strays to Brookhaven shelter? Residents and Brookhaven councilwoman say 'no way'

Last Updated on Tuesday, 01 March 2011 17:18 Tuesday, 01 March 2011 17:15

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Animal rights advocates turned out at today's Town Board meeting to object to an idea they said Police Chief David Hegermiller put on the table at an animal shelter advisory committee meeting Monday evening: sending Riverhead dogs to the Brookhaven Town animal shelter.

Rex Farr of Calverton was blunt: "There's no way that's going to happen."

Supervisor Sean Walter, who said he's discussed the idea with Brookhaven Supervisor Mark Lesko said after the meeting he thinks using Brookhaven's shelter is a "perfect solution" for Riverhead's animal shelter problems.

But Brookhaven Councilmember Jane Bonner, the Town Council's animal shelter liaison, echoed Farr's conclusion.

"It can't happen," she said today. "We're full. We're more than full. We've got dogs doubled up in pens," Bonner said. "We've got cats stacked up on top of each other in cages."

And the councilwoman was more than a little miffed that the Brookhaven supervisor was discussing taking on another town's dogs without talking to her about it first.

"I guess they're planning a fact-finding mission of sorts," Bonner said.

At today's meeting, Farr and Sue Hansen of Rocky Point both demanded — yet again — that animal control officer Lou Coronesi have nothing further to do with animals in Riverhead Town. Coronesi and shelter volunteers have been at odds for a long time, but things recently came to a head over a pit bull Coronesi had destroyed. The animal control officer said the dog had a bite history and bit a child, which turned out not to be the case. Animal advocates have also complained that the town employs Coronesi in spite of arrest on and subsequent no contest plea to criminal charges involving capturing protected species in Arizona several years ago. They have demanded his termination, so far without result.

Farr said the supervisor last week asked him for "a 30-day grace period" to come up with a solution to the animal control officer dilemma. Walter acknowledged as much from the dais at today's meeting, but would not go into details of a personnel matter in a public forum.

"Sending our dogs to Brookhaven is not an acceptable solution," Farr said. "If a resident's dog is picked up, he'll have to drive to Yaphank to retrieve it? I don't think so."

Councilman James Wooten, Riverhead's animal shelter liaison has said he favors putting an animal shelter director in charge of the facility, "moving away from the animal control officer model." He says animal control and running a shelter are two different functions and should be separated. He proposed shifting a town employee from another position to the shelter, at no net cost to the town. The employee, whom he did not name, has already passed the civil service test for shelter director, he said.

Wooten said he also favored transferring Coronesi out of the animal control officer position into some other department. A second animal control officer, Sean McCabe, was laid off Jan. 1 along with 12 other town employees. But he was rehired when a position opened up in the town's sewer district. Wooten said he'd support swapping McCabe and Coronesi, so that McCabe would return to the ACO post and Coronesi would work at the sewer district.

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