



## GOVERNMENT

### Shelter Stand-Off Continues, Now Crossing Town Lines

Supervisors consider shipping Riverhead shelter dogs to Brookhaven; animal shelter liaisons not on board.

By **John Stefans** March 2, 2011

Councilman Jim Wooten said Wednesday that he doesn't think much of Supervisor Sean Walter's suggestion about closing the town's animal shelter on Youngs Avenue and having Brookhaven's animal shelter take over the responsibility for boarding dogs that have either been surrendered by their owners or picked up as strays in Riverhead.



As Walter acknowledged Tuesday - and Police Chief David Hegermiller said at the Animal Advisory Committee Meeting on Monday - he has had a brief discussion about the idea with Brookhaven Supervisor Mark Lesko, describing the proposal as a perfect example of a town saving money by sharing services with another municipality.

Hegermiller summed it up in one word on Monday: "consolidation."

Walter said that a partnership with Brookhaven would have the potential of saving Riverhead taxpayers \$100,000 a year.

But Wooten, who is town board liaison to Riverhead's animal advisory committee - though was absent at Monday's meeting - contends that the idea has little to do with saving money and is, instead, a way for Walter to skirt a problem that the town ought to face head on.

"Our shelter is not the problem," Wooten said. "The problem is the management structure and who's calling the shots. If there was anybody else up there, it would probably not be an issue at all."

His reference was to animal control officer Lou Coronesi, who has been criticized for years for being uncooperative with volunteers at the shelter. More recently, he was accused of lying to Walter about the circumstances that caused him to recommend that a dog at the shelter be euthanized.

The dog, a pit bull named Bruno, had been described in writing by Coronesi as having showed improvement, only to be put down the very next day, with Coronesi claiming it was necessary. Coronesi had also reported that Bruno had bitten a child when, it was later found, he hadn't.

"For what he did," Wooten said, "he should have at least been suspended if not downright dismissed."

Walter said yesterday that he had already taken disciplinary action against Coronesi, which Wooten described as having a letter of reprimand place in his file.

Wooten said that Walter's plan to partner with Brookhaven "came out of the blue" for him.

Members of the Animal Advisory Committee showed likewise distaste for the plan on Monday night.

"What, are you going to take a day off work to go over to Yaphank just if your dog gets out?" said committee member Connie Farr, whose husband, Rex, spoke out against the plan at Tuesday's board meeting.

The plan also came as a surprise to Brookhaven Councilwoman Jane Bonner, who said Wednesday that she had only heard of the idea the day before, despite being town board liaison to her town's animal shelter.

"We are full to the brim with cats and dogs," Bonner said of the Brookhaven shelter. "We're so full that we're offering incentives to rescue groups to adopt out our pit bulls."

Bonner explained that a charitable foundation she had helped set up several years ago has been offering \$250 for every pit bull adopted out by a certified rescue group and given a good home.

She said she had spoken to Lesko after seeing media reports about his conversation with Walter.

"He apologized profusely and said it was just a passing comment that he and Supervisor Walter had had at a Pine Barrens Commission meeting," Bonner said.

Wooten said he hopes that Walter and the rest of the town board will go along with his proposal to hire a full-time shelter director, taking that responsibility away from Coronesi.

Although he's not keen on a partnership with Brookhaven, Wooten said he would nevertheless join Walter in a meeting Monday with Lesko and the head of Brookhaven's shelter, Lori Scofield.

*Joseph Pinciario contributed to this report.*

**What do you think of Supervisor Walter's suggestion that Riverhead's shelter dogs be transferred to Brookhaven's animal shelter? [Tell us in the comments.](#)**

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