



RiverheadPatch

GOVERNMENT

Town Hall Notes: No Answer Yet on Future of Animal Shelter Head

With town audits past due, town hires outside help.

By **John Stefans** February 2, 2011

After word got out last month

(<http://riverhead.patch.com/articles/wooten-animal-control-officer-may-be-in-line-to-lose-position>) that animal control officer Lou Coronese's job may be on the line, neither Supervisor Sean Walter nor Councilman Jim Wooten, citing the need for confidentiality in personnel matters, would give a direct answer when pressed relentlessly at Tuesday's town board meeting by Pat Lynch, a shelter volunteer who was banned from the facility after disagreements with Coronese.

But both seemed to hint that something was in the works. And responding to a reporter's question the day before, Wooten said that Coronese's fate would be discussed again during an executive session of the town board scheduled for Thursday.

Wooten also said Tuesday that the animal control advisory committee, to which he is town board liaison, had drawn up a new euthanasia policy that is now being reviewed by the town attorney's office and would be the subject of an advisory committee meeting next Monday.

"I can give you some information," Wooten told Lynch. "We did look into Bruno, and there were some inconsistencies with his ultimate demise as opposed to what his condition was 24 hours prior."

"Suffice it to say that it's been dealt with," added Walter, "and we really can't discuss it anymore."

The inconsistencies Wooten referred to, [reported by Riverhead Patch nearly a month ago](http://riverhead.patch.com/articles/letters-show-euthanized-dog-showed-great-improvement-before-being-put-down-by-town) (<http://riverhead.patch.com/articles/letters-show-euthanized-dog-showed-great-improvement-before-being-put-down-by-town>), involved a report filed by Coronese less than a week before Bruno was put down, stating that "the staff has worked with this animal and it is showing great improvement."

The very next day, however, Coronese submitted a new report saying that the dog was found to be aggressive and had, in fact, bitten a child – the reason, he said, for the decision of Bruno's owners back in October to release him to the shelter.

An investigation into the matter ultimately revealed, however, that it was the 22-year-old son of Bruno's owner – and not a child – who had been bitten, although not severely, and that the bite had occurred when the son was attempting to break a dog fight.

"A dog died unnecessarily," Lynch said, "and I think it's a reasonable question to ask whether the man who made that decision is still with the shelter, and that should be known by Riverhead taxpayers who are paying his salary."

Town audits long overdue

With the Town of Riverhead behind in completing independent audits going back to 2008, the town board on Tuesday approved the hiring of three outside accounting firms to work with the town's financial administrator, Bill Rothaar, in bringing the audits up to date.

According to Supervisor Walter, there were errors found in the 2008 audit after it was submitted and there is a need to go back and correct the mistakes. He said work on the 2009 audit had only just begun and that he hopes, with outside assistance, to have it completed by April. As for the 2010 audit, he said he has ordered that it be completed no later than November of this year.

Walter said it was essential to bring the audits current because, absent that, the town could not issue long-term bonds. The only thing it could do in the interim would be to issue short-term bond-anticipation notes, which carry much higher rates of interest.

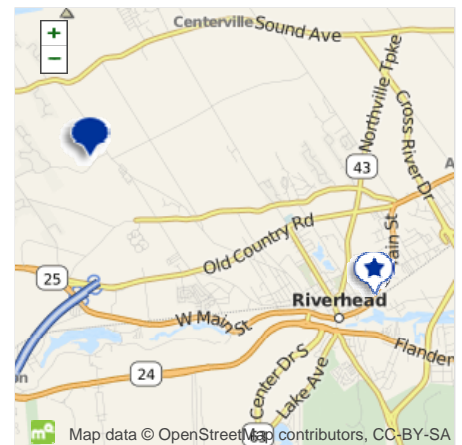
"From a financial standpoint, there is nothing more important to me and the rest of the board than to get these audits done," he said.

Walter's explanation came in response to a question from Matt Hattoff, president of the Riverhead chapter of the Civil Service Employee Association, the union representing town workers, who wanted to know why the audits couldn't be completed by existing internal staff.

"As much as they have tried – and the accounting department has done everything they can, including working overtime and on weekends – they are not in a position to catch up," Walter told Hattoff.



PHOTOS (2)



Walter said the cost of hiring the three firms would amount to approximately \$50,000, which would be a “pittance,” he said, compared with the higher interest rates the town would face in issuing short-term notes.

Walter said that following the death of long-time financial administrator Jack Hanson in 2004, the town had been without a full-time financial administrator for more than two years.

Should Lou Coronesi be allowed to keep his job as director of Riverhead's animal shelter? And do you think the town should hire an outside firm to help with its audits? [Tell us in the comments.](#)

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