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Slug:	LANNWS-10-11-23 LC SHELTER
Print depth:	30.50 (4544 characters)
Start date/time:	Sep 19, 2023 01:48 PM
Section tags:	nc-lan
	nc-lan/news
	nc-lan/news/government
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Content

The Lancaster County Animal Shelter is at capacity with the influx of animals being brought in daily. Shelter volunteers have deemed it an "emergency situation," and want Lancaster County Council to enact ordinances to prevent this cyclical issue.

Ordinances needed

Hannah Buccini has been a volunteer with Lancaster SCPA and the county animal shelter for five years. She said throughout her time with the shelter, she has attended County Council meetings, emailed council members and tried to get ordinance revisions and additions enacted.

"I think (council) sees that these volunteers and the shelter employees, we're working hard every single week to kind of keep/maintain the same rate that we have, but it's not sustainable," she said.

Buccini applauded Lexington County Council, which has enacted strong animal ordinances, and said she hopes Lancaster County can follow suit. She said while Lancaster County has animal control ordinances in place, but they need to be extended and updated.

Alanna Macphearson has been a volunteer with the county shelter and Lancaster SCPA for a year and a half, and said neither the state nor county has an ordinance in place to restrict breeding or chaining and tethering dogs.

"The animal welfare laws in general are very vague," Macphearson said. "It is a big issue, because we have to work 24/7 in order to spare as many lives as we can at the shelter."

Lancaster County Administrator Dennis Marstall said it's unfortunate that the council has to consider any ordinance to change human behavior against animal cruelty.

"Having the animal shelter, we think, is a beneficial service, but one that's tough to manage, with a growing population, such as Lancaster County," he said. "That also means more animals, but we have made investments in (the) animal shelter and continue to do so."

Marstall said managing the number of animals that come to the shelter daily is not in council's control, and there is an ordinance in place that "outlines some different ways or behaviors that citizens need to adhere to when it comes to animal safety.

"I know there are some folks who think we can go further with the animal control ordinance," he said. "I've met with a lot of folks and I'm certainly happy to continue to review that and see what best fits Lancaster County."

Marstall said there is also an agenda item planned for a future County Council meeting to address citizen input on the animal control ordinance by the end of 2023.

Shelter limitations

It's not just dogs filling the kennels and risking euthanasia. Several cats and kittens are also brought in daily.

"We've just hit a point where it's astronomical," MacPhearson said.

Buccini said this year's influx is likely the result of pandemic puppies, with many people "getting dogs from anywhere and everywhere.

"They couldn't (necessarily) afford their ongoing care or to fix them," she said. "People continue to get puppies without spaying or neutering them, so they're just out there breeding and reproducing, continuing the cycle. Ultimately, it just continues to get worse, (and) our intake levels for this year are almost three times that of last year."

In September alone, the shelter had to euthanize seven dogs, according to Marstall. It does not euthanize cats. He also said while the overcrowding is an issue, Lancaster County's euthanasia numbers are low in comparison to other counties.

"I think you will find we do a pretty good job of managing the space and flow of the animals, (but) it's a daily battle to manage the shelter capacity," Marstall said.

The shelter has 46 runs for dogs, which can hold up to 60 dogs. The shelter also has 30 cat cages, which can hold up to 70 cats.

Volunteers needed

"We're trying to urge people to show the County Council that it's not just us," Buccini said. "It needs to really come from the general public, not just the people who are volunteering their time."

The shelter has a volunteer application on its website and encourages anyone to apply. People can volunteer to walk dogs, care for cats and dogs, foster and transport animals from one shelter to another.

To rescue an animal, the adoption fee is $100 for dogs and $80 for cats. The fee includes spay or neuter, microchip, heartworm tests and more.

"We're always gonna want to push for adoption, but really it's volunteers on the ground at the shelter (that make the difference)," Buccini said.

The shelter is open 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Friday, but closed from noon to 1 p.m. for lunch. Its number is 803-286-8103 and address is 2074 Pageland Highway, Lancaster.

Child images

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