



State of Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission

Office of the Governor

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Report submitted to: Ville Platte Animal Control Officials and Ville Platte Municipal Government

Date of Report: November 3, 2009

Representatives of the Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH), Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section, recently completed an audit of your shelter facilities located in Ville Platte, Louisiana. The Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission (LAWC) is very grateful for your cooperation in the audit. The goal of this audit is to assist local and parish governing agencies in evaluating shelter facilities and planning improvements. Please accept the following comments in the constructive manner in which they are intended.

The Ville Platte animal shelter provided OPH personnel ready access to animal and personnel records. The shelter staff was very accommodating and shared information freely. The shelter provides services to the citizens of Ville Platte during regularly scheduled business hours. Primary animal enclosures appear to be well maintained and sanitation methods appear to be compliant with acceptable methods of shelter hygiene. Food is stored in sealed "garbage can" galvanized receptacles and is protected from rodent infestation. All euthanasia is performed by a licensed veterinarian. Lethal injection, the preferred method of euthanasia in most pet species, is the exclusive method of euthanasia employed at the shelter. The shelter director has completed formal training in animal control and in chemical capture of animals.

The shelter is also to be commended for employing a five day holding policy on healthy stray animals, prior to decisions on euthanasia or adoption. In many jurisdictions the duration of holding is much shorter and adversely affects efforts to return strays to owners.

LAWC wishes to assure shelter management and governing authorities that the comments in this report are not intended to embarrass or penalize the Ville Platte shelter, but are intended to point out actual deficiencies at the shelter. Public awareness of these deficiencies was reflected in receipt by the commission of several requests to inspect the shelter. LAWC realizes that many of the proposed changes will involve significant departures from the present management paradigm and will involve expenditures of funds that may not be readily available. LAWC is ready to assist officials in identifying means to address the problems mentioned below. Please do not hesitate to contact the commission regarding the proposed corrections.

I. The following suggestions are made based on the state statute (R.S. 3:2461, et seq.) listing minimum standards that may be adopted by parish governing authorities:

A. Veterinary care: Although the Ville Platte Animal Shelter utilizes the services of a local veterinarian to carry out euthanasia of injured or sick animals, reports from the public of sick or injured animals often

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left for days at the facility prior to death have been confirmed by inspectors. Upon inquiry, the animal control officer affirmed that the veterinarian comes to the facility about once per month and that sick or injured animals expire on a regular basis without being observed by the veterinarian. Louisiana statute requires that "Any ill or injured animal shall be isolated and made as comfortable as possible until veterinary care is obtained or the animal is euthanized if in legal compliance." If the shelter is not financially capable of providing veterinary care for injured or ill animals in a reasonable period of time, the animal shelter director should immediately seek training in animal health and should be certified by the Louisiana Board of Veterinary Medicine to administer euthanasia drugs when indicated.

The aforementioned practice of leaving sick or injured animals for several days without veterinary care in all likelihood is inconsistent with requirements specified in Louisiana Revised Statutes 14:102.1 which states, "Any person who intentionally or with criminal negligence commits any of the following shall be guilty of simple cruelty to animals:...Having charge, custody, or possession of any animal, either as the owner or otherwise, unjustifiably fails to provide it with proper food, proper drink, proper shelter, or proper veterinary care." Proper veterinary care is defined as providing each animal with veterinary care sufficient to prevent unnecessary or unjustifiable physical pain or suffering by the animal. Therefore the present situation may also be interpreted as an example of simple cruelty, and begs for immediate correction.

The ultimate goal, either through increased funding or through a public/private partnership with a local or regional humane organization, should be for the shelter to utilize veterinary expertise to determine if the animals can be easily treated and made available for adoption, thus eliminating the necessity for unnecessary euthanasia.

B. Shelter standards: Although Ville Platte Animal Control abides by Article I and II of the city ordinances in issues related to stray animals, impoundment, vicious dogs, dog fighting and cruelty to animals; shelter standards, such as those specified in the Louisiana Revised Statutes, are not included in the ordinance. City government is strongly urged to include shelter standards in municipal ordinances.

C. Adequate local supervision: Louisiana law states that "shelters should be inspected at least once every six months by an authorized representative of the parish to determine compliance with the requirements" set forth in state statutes. Although the supervisory structure of the shelter was thoroughly explained to the auditors, a formal inspection program has not been implemented. LAWC suggests that the shelter director establish a regular program of inspection by a designated city or parish official and document the results for later examination by OPH auditors. This system of inspection should be recorded in a written policy.

D. Washrooms and Plumbing: The Louisiana Revised Statutes state, "Facilities such as washrooms, basins, or sinks, shall be provided to maintain cleanliness among animal caretakers." Additional wash basins are desirable in animal wards or animal contact areas and would increase the ability of employees to practice good hygiene and effective infection control. If these types of improvements are not feasible in the near future, the shelter should consider installation of several hand sanitizer stations throughout all areas of the facility. A hand sanitizer station should also be installed in the restroom facility in the office structure. Use of hand sanitizer would benefit the health of both the animals and staff. Signs instructing employees to wash hands after using the restroom before returning to work are also helpful in promoting hygiene.

E. The Louisiana Revised Statutes state that "shelter shall be provided for all dogs and cats kept outdoors when atmospheric temperature falls below fifty degrees Fahrenheit." This kennel structure may sometimes expose animals to temperatures less than 50 degrees Fahrenheit, which is the threshold below

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which the statutes suggest additional protection from the cold. This shelter provides no additional protection when the temperature drops below this minimum temperature. A heating system of some type would greatly improve conditions at the facility and protect animals more thoroughly from the elements. If installation of a heating system is beyond the financial means of the city, then other protective methods might be employed, such as provision of blankets and/or plastic shelters for animals or installation of heavy insulated curtains to cover openings to the outside.

F. State law also provides that "Indoor housing facilities for dogs or cats shall be adequately ventilated to provide for the health and comfort of the animals at all times. Such facilities shall be provided with fresh air either by means of windows, doors, vents, or air conditioning and shall be ventilated so as to minimize drafts, odors, and moisture condensation. Auxiliary ventilation, such as exhaust fans and vents of air conditioning, shall be provided when the ambient temperature is eighty-five degrees Fahrenheit or higher." Inspectors learned that the temperature of the facility during the warmer months of the year reaches approximately one hundred ten degrees Fahrenheit. An "attic" type fan for ventilation is present, but the fan is non-functional. Two auxiliary fans were also observed in the storeroom. According to the director, the fans are deployed during the hottest parts of the year. Shelter management should confirm that the fans reduce the temperature so as to be in compliance with state law. If not, then the municipality should make the appropriate corrections to the ventilation system.

G. Primary enclosures: Louisiana law states that "primary enclosures for housing cats shall provide a minimum of two and one-half square feet of floor space per cat" and that they "have a solid floor" in a cage that accommodates use of a litter pan. The law also states that "Primary enclosures shall be constructed and maintained so as to provide sufficient space to allow each dog and cat to turn about freely and to easily stand, sit, and lie in a comfortable, normal position." The inspectors observed that galvanized traps are used to house cats while awaiting reclamation or euthanasia. Given that the veterinarian is not present daily, these cats are likely housed in these contraptions for several days. This practice should cease immediately and appropriate stainless steel or fiberglass caging should be provided as soon as possible.

H. The Louisiana State Sanitary Code (Title 51, Part III, Chapter 1 of the Louisiana Administrative Code) states, "No person shall own, keep or have in his custody a dog, cat, or ferret over three months of age that has not been vaccinated against rabies by a licensed veterinarian. Every owner of a dog, cat, or ferret shall cause said animal to be vaccinated initially with a series of two vaccinations, the first to be administered at three months of age, the second to be administered one year after the initial vaccination. Dogs, cats, or ferrets initially vaccinated later than three months of age shall also be administered a series of two vaccines, the second vaccine to be given one year after the initial vaccination. Subsequent booster vaccines shall be administered one year after the administration of a vaccine that confers one year of immunity and three years after the administration of a vaccine that confers three years of immunity. Approved vaccines and durations of immunity are listed in the most recent *Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control* prepared by the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, Inc." The Ville Platte Animal shelter does nothing to ensure that adopted or reclaimed animals are vaccinated for rabies. It is nearly a universal policy of all public shelters to ensure compliance with rabies laws. Most shelters originally came into existence as part of a nationwide initiative to decrease the number of incident cases of rabies virus infection in humans. In fact, animal control and pet vaccine requirements have been successful in reducing the incidence of human rabies in the United States to an average of one or two cases per year, although nothing about the epidemiology of the disease in nature has changed. Terrestrial and bat variants of rabies virus circulate within Evangeline Parish and surrounding areas and pose a danger to all warm blooded animals in the area, including pets and humans. The presence of a rabid dog, cat, or ferret in populated areas is considered a public health emergency. Studies have demonstrated that compliance with vaccine requirements for pets in some areas of Louisiana

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is woefully inadequate. A primary part of the mission of any animal control shelter is rabies control and prevention. Louisiana OPH implores shelters in the state to ensure vaccine compliance in adopted pets. Several methods are employed by shelters to ensure rabies vaccination compliance in adopted animals. LAWC and OPH are available for consultation to suggest accepted methods.

I. In Article II, Division 2, Sections 5-29 to 5-32 of the Ville Platte city ordinances, a registration program is mandated. However, we found no evidence from the animal control section of Ville Platte government that a city registration process was in effect. LAWC feels that the City of Ville Platte has the potential to emulate other Louisiana communities in the establishment of a city registration or licensing program. Licensing programs of this type are utilized in many communities to provide funding for animal control activities and shelters. Many of the improvements mentioned in this document could be easily funded through such a program. LAWC is available to assist in the creation of such a program and, certainly, the commission encourages city officials to contact LAWC for assistance.

J. Signage on property: Louisiana Revised Statutes specify that "Shelters shall be open for the redemption and adoption of animals during posted or normal business hours. Hours of operation and emergency telephone number shall be prominently displayed." Inspectors did not observe a sign displaying prominently hours of operation or emergency telephone number. Due to the small staff of the shelter and the necessity of animal control officer(s) to leave the facility, the utility of a prominent sign displaying these items is self explanatory. Fees should also be posted on a large sign at the entrance or in the office area of the facility, as required by statute.

K. Separation of non-neutered males and females: Louisiana law states, "Unneutered males shall be separated from females." Inspectors observed that records on individual animals were inadequate and that no provision was made to identify resident animals as to gender or reproductive status. State law also requires that "A record shall be prepared for every animal that enters the shelter and shall include a description of the animal; veterinary treatment; length of time held; fees collected; and date euthanized, died, reclaimed, or adopted." The status of incoming animals, whether surrender or stray, is not indicated on the records. This is important for efforts to identify owners or to offer the animal for adoption. Important information, such as breed of dog or age is also not recorded. The shelter staff also maintains no records on adoption. LAWC suggests that records be redesigned so objective simple entries can be made and checked off. Records should be in a form whereby yearly summaries of intake, reclamation and euthanasia can be provided to LAWC as required by state law.

LAWC inspectors demonstrated to the shelter director the manner in which modern computer technology and the use of digital photographs and inexpensive printers could be used to address the deficiencies in record keeping. LAWC has been introduced to several shelter management software packages. Some of these packages may be available to Louisiana shelters at no cost. LAWC encourages the use of shelter management software packages in Louisiana shelters. Please contact LAWC if interested in learning more about these programs and other methods of enhanced record keeping.

II. Adoption of the following practices should serve to improve the public image of the facility, enhance health and safety of the animals and workers, and/or decrease the likelihood of legal incidents and public complaints.

Suggestions by LAWC to improve shelter management:

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A. Future improvements to the physical plant should include planning for isolation of new intakes and animals that suffer from minor health conditions. A larger facility that could facilitate a true isolation ward might result in a decrease in euthanasia procedures and a decreased potential for introduction of diseases.

B. LAWC recommends that management create written policies for storage of food and supplies, shelter cleaning and hygiene, isolation and care of sick or injured animals, shelter oversight, and euthanasia. Inspectors learned that primary enclosures are cleaned once daily with a dilute bleach solution and pine oil. Certainly this is an adequate means of hygiene; however no set dilution strength of the bleach solution was specified. This type of information should be set down in writing so that consistent and effective methods can be employed by present and future staff.

C. LAWC recommends a formal "two-tiered" procedure for approval of euthanasia be adopted, whereby the decision to euthanize animals must be approved or attested to by a combination of two of the following personnel: shelter director, kennel manager, animal control officer, veterinarian, city official. The second official could attest to the euthanasia procedures after the fact, considering the small size of the shelter staff.

D. The city should fund additional training for the shelter staff, including training as a certified euthanasia technician, in the humane handling and care of animals, and in recognition of common animal diseases. LAWC can assist in identifying sources of training.

E. Although the shelter staff does a fine job of protecting animal food from infestation as stated previously, management should consider use of sealable plastic containers. Zinc from the galvanized "garbage cans" could possibly leach into animal feed and result in the presence of unwanted heavy metals in food.

F. There are ongoing problems with break-ins at the facility, usually for the purpose of stealing animals, primarily pit bull type dogs. The facility is in a fairly isolated area in the rear of a municipal maintenance and utility facility. Although additional expenditures would be required, city government should consider implementation of electronic security if the facility is not manned 24/7. Improvements such as additional lighting, security cameras and burglar alarms could be used to improve security at the shelter.

G. There is no separate room for euthanasia presently at the facility. This lack of a euthanasia facility is a result of the fact that most animals are brought to the veterinarian or are euthanized by the veterinarian at the shelter in cages. A separate euthanasia room should be constructed at the facility or a room currently utilized for storage should be converted to such. The veterinarian should visit the site to perform euthanasia. However, should the animals be transported to the veterinarian, care should be exercised (e.g. keeping the animal in a carrying cage until being placed on the veterinarian's table for euthanasia, subsequent disinfection of carrying cages and the veterinarian's exam room and table) to eliminate transmission of contagious diseases to pets or other animals belonging to the general public.

H. There is no adoption program at the facility. LAWC encourages the formation of public private partnerships, such as a partnership between local humane organizations and the shelter, for the development of adoption programs, when municipal assets do not permit the conduct of an adoption program utilizing city funds. LAWC can help in the creation of such partnerships. In most adoption programs, adoptable dogs are identified upon entry to the shelter, and health exams, parasite treatments and vaccines are then administered.

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I. The shelter should develop a program to ensure that post adoption or post reclamation spaying or neutering is carried out on animals leaving the shelter. This is a major deficiency and one that is easily addressed at most Louisiana animal control facilities without incurring any expense. Several model programs are available and LAWC can assist in suggesting such programs. Ignoring the problem of pet overpopulation is a major mistake by local governments, and exacerbates problems already experienced at local shelters.

J. The absence of an attractive reception facility may negatively affect the public's perception of the quality of the facility and might reduce the facility's capacity to attract individuals capable of adopting pets. This facility serves a small city and improvement or expansion of reception, animal treatment, animal housing, and storage areas would benefit the shelter, animals, and citizens of Ville Platte. Management runs this operation under extremely austere circumstances and deserves credit for doing so. Expansion and improvement of the physical plant and increased funding would ameliorate many of the deficiencies observed. As suggested previously, municipal licensing programs and public/private partnerships can often generate operating funds without increases in local taxes.

As is seen in most public shelters in Louisiana, the proportion of animals reclaimed by owners or adopted is relatively low in comparison to the number of animals taken in. LAWC may be able to assist in suggesting means for creation of an adoption program. Several methods may be considered (e.g. partnerships with local or regional humane organizations, utilization of foster care, employment of the internet in attempts to better market adoptable animals, weekend hours open to the public, expansion and improvement of the facility to enhance public perception and accessibility).

This concludes the report. OPH will request the statistics from calendar year 2009 in early January. Please be vigilant for the request.

LAWC wishes to remind city officials that the commission is very happy to provide advice and expertise pertaining to shelter design and function, should future plans include expansion, remodeling, or construction of new facilities.

Thanks again to the Ville Platte Animal Shelter and its staff for cooperation in this audit. LAWC recognizes the shelters' dedication to humane animal control and animal welfare in Louisiana.

Submitted by: The Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission



Brian Melius, Chairman, LAWC Subcommittee on Inspections

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