Animal Care and Control Oversight Commission (ACCOC)

September 17, 2013
Meeting minutes

ACCO MEMBERS PRESENT: Veronica Dougherty, Laura Hudson, Ricky Lewis, and Lyn Yelton

County staff: none

ACCA representatives: none

Meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm

Secretary Ricky Lewis read the minutes from the last meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Lewis to amend the minutes to include and record his opposition to the idea of cat licensing and to reflect his support for Trap-Neuter-Return programs. In addition, a motion was made by Lyn Yelton to clarify that she also had questions about what was needed for the exercise programs. Both motions were accepted unanimously by the Committee. These comments will be added to the minutes.

Old Business

All committee members recognized A Buddy for Life (ABFL) for its efforts to become more visible to the public.

Mr. Lewis expressed concern about how business was conducted by the ACCOC. Mr. Lewis made a motion to require the Committee to vote on the issues prior to taking any action and/or providing recommendations on behalf of the Committee. Mr. Lewis also expressed his opinion that the Committee should not spend time discussing matters that they, as a quorum, do not believe are a priority. Ms. Dougherty seconded the motion and it received a unanimous vote from all members present.

Mr. Lewis and other members of the Committee expressed concern about the amount of time that was being scheduled for the Committee to work on revising Section 209 (i.e., the newly-passed animal care and control laws). Chairperson Yelton stated that because the review of laws is within the Committee's duties, the Committee has an obligation to review the laws and recommend changes. Mr. Lewis and Ms. Hudson disagreed with Ms. Yelton and expressed their belief that there is no need for extensive review and/or changes in the law since the council members reviewed the law for three years, made revisions in committee, and voted on the ordinance as it read. They also noted that the law has only been in effect for a short period of time. Ms. Hudson suggested that Chairperson Yelton's opposition to Section 209 is personal and that the rest of the Committee may not feel the same way. Ms. Hudson then read a public comment from the Cecil Whig website in which Chairperson Yelton posted her opinion that “Section 209 should be scrapped in its entirety”.

Mr. Lewis expressed that he does not agree with Chairperson Yelton's stance on Section 209, and that he strongly disagrees with her intention to change the kennel laws within Section 209. Mr. Lewis suggested that Chairperson Yelton's comments against the law conflict with the role and duty of the Commission, which is responsible for upholding the county law, not doing away with it. He also stated
his opinion that it is a conflict of interest for Chairperson Yelton to attempt to change the kennel portions of Section 209 because she is herself a kennel operator.

Ms. Dougherty expressed her opinion that while there are certain sections that may need minor revisions at some point (e.g., dog license fees, senior discounts), it is not necessary to go over the document with a “fine-tooth comb”. She also suggested that the Committee address some of the other ideas in committee before proceeding with this item. Mr. Lewis expressed concern about the Committee taking any action without first taking a vote on the matter.

The Committee discussed the primary role of the Animal Care and Control Oversight Commission. The majority of committee members felt that the primary role of the Commission is to oversee quality control for the Animal Care and Control Authority.

The Committee briefly discussed other items which they may want to re-visit at a future meeting.

Ms. Yelton and Mr. Lewis entertained the idea of a pet emergency plan and evacuation route for the county.

Other suggestions included creation of a website listing “pet friendly” rentals for individuals who are forced to move due to foreclosure, with the idea that this information would be accessible through the ABFL website. Another suggestion was to establish a certificate program through local vets to help low-income families, which would benefit local businesses and pet owners alike. These items will be discussed further at a later date.

**New Business**

Ms. Dougherty reported that she compared some of the dog licensing fees to those in other counties and believes that the only thing that may need to be changed is for the county to offer a better senior discount or base the fee on a sliding scale proportionate to one’s income. She also suggested offering a discount for anyone who had their dog micro-chipped.

Mr. Lewis indicated that if the Committee wanted more information about how TNR programs work, he would prefer to do so via a PowerPoint presentation and that he would need more time to prepare. The Committee welcomed the idea and will look into scheduling this at a later date.

Ms. Yelton reported that she had some concerns about the kennel section of 209 which mandates a six-month checkup for all dogs by a Maryland vet. Ms. Yelton also expressed concern about people’s confusion regarding the exercise program requirements and wondered if the vets would sign them. Mr. Lewis indicated that he discussed this issue with ABFL and that the impression he got was that the veterinary practice was to sign off verifying that a two-hour program or larger dog run was in place. Ms. Yelton felt that the law should be changed and asked for clarification on the question. Ms. Dougherty proposed asking ABFL if a signature from the vet would be adequate in lieu of the mandatory two-hour exercise. She also questioned why dogs have to be seen every six months as opposed to once a year. The Commission agreed to ask ABFL for clarification on these questions.

Ms. Hudson reported on her review of equine-related issues of the Animal Care and Control laws and
stated that she believes they are adequate as written. She also expressed that she would like to see continued education among the officers for equine handling.

The meeting was then opened up for public comment.

Joe Quinn of Elkton, Maryland, expressed his concern as a kennel operator about the process of implementing an exercise program. He stated that he believes a two-hour-a-day exercise program is too much. He said he did not feel an exercise program should be mandated at all. He also had some questions about how to complete the application. Mr. Quinn was upset about some recent fines that were handed out because his kennel license had lapsed and he could not get the paperwork signed by his vet. Animal Care and Control had given a verbal warning to the kennel prior to the citation. Mr. Quinn also stated that he does not feel he should have to attach approval from zoning to his application.

Valerie Refner of Port Deposit, Maryland, asked for clarification about how to complete the application.

Shawn Soldon of Elkton voiced concern about some recent fines that were handed out. She stated that she had received a prior warning four days earlier and had received a letter in May informing her that the process needed to be done. The citation was for operating a kennel without a license. She claims she could not get a veterinarian to sign the form for the application. She felt that a mandated exercise plan was not necessary.

The Committee recommended having a meeting with ABFL and the kennel operators to assist them with the application process.

A public work session was scheduled for Thursday, September 26, 2013.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.