

**San Francisco Animal Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
November 10, 2022**

**1. Call to Order and Roll Call**

Present: Michael Angelo Torres, Annemarie Fortier, Irina Ozernoy, Jane Tobin(late), Nina Irani, Brian Van Horn, ACC Director Virginia Donohue, DVM/ACC,

Absent: Commissioner Chan, Christopher Campbell, SF RPD, Officer Sutherland, SFPD

**2. General Public Comment**

One caller requested ACC to reinstate the "Call Interested Party" (CIP) policy which allowed for a person (interested party) to be notified if an animal was in danger of euthanasia. Another asked about the absence of SFPD at our meetings and that the Commission revisit the glue trap discussion.

**3. Approval of Draft Minutes from October 13, 2022, Meeting** - Approval postponed until January agenda.

**4. Chairperson's and Commissioners' Reports** - No reports.

**5. New Business**

- A. Shock-Free San Francisco** - Letter of Support approval for draft legislation or edits [Action Item]  
[Commissioner Torres introducing for Commissioner Tobin]

**Written public comments**

Chairperson Torres opened for public comment but first read the written comments submitted to the Commission. In summary, **there are 11 in support** of the ban of shock collars in San Francisco **and two opposed** to the ban.

**Public comments at the meeting**

Chairperson Torres opened for public comment. **27 calls opposed to the ban** and their reasons are summarized as follows:

- Safety of the animal. Safety of the public from aggressive dogs.
- Last tool used for extreme behavior
- Reduces the risk of euthanasia for some dogs.
- With proper training and under the supervision of a trainer it is effective.
- It is not inhumane. Like any tool, it can be used effectively or ineffectively.
- Police/Military use e-collars.
- Used for rattlesnake aversion.
- Regulate or permit trainers who do use
- Regulate the standards for devices to ensure their safety.
- This policy could set precedent for other cities and states or nationally where the situations are not like San Francisco.
- E-collars may make a difference for older or disabled people who might not otherwise be able to control their dogs. Banning them would be ableist.
- Shock collars don't hurt.

**5 calls in support of the ban** and their reasons are summarized as follows:

- Risk of redirection of pain on handler or other animals.
- Physical harm from devices.
- Rattlesnake training can be done without force, and the caller suggested other training techniques in practice.
- Shock collars don't address the underlying behavior issue or heal the dog.
- San Francisco-based legislation. Let San Francisco lead in animal welfare.
- Many opposed are dog walkers and not from San Francisco.

Outcome - After discussion amongst commissioners, it was agreed to postpone sending the letter until commissioners had time to research. The commission will report back in January on sending the letter of support.

**B. Animal Care and Control Admissions Policy** [Discussion Item] [Commissioner Torres] Discussion with Virginia Donohue, Executive Director of the Department of Animal Care and Control; Maria Conlon, from Give Me Shelter Rescue; and Alena Ja, volunteer with SF SPCA.

Two Issues

1. Members of the Community do not agree with the intake policy for healthy cats.
2. The community's issue is also that the policy is not being administered consistently.

ACC continues to support the policy yet acknowledges that how the policy is executed needs work.

ACC will develop clearer and more consistent training materials and scenarios with an internal group to ensure the policy is administered consistently. Goal = Better service.

ACC is tracking data on individuals who are calling the shelter about the found cats that were not admitted to the shelter. ACC will report data on cats not being admitted to the shelter to the commission in the coming months.

Maria Conlon prepared a statement in response to ACC's presentation. Questions

1. # of S/N surgeries ACC can do in one week?
2. Why are the fosters not being utilized?
3. How is the budget being allocated? Can we see a breakdown?
4. ACC reported feral queens and kittens decline in foster care, but where is the data to support the claims?

**Other concerns/questions/comments**

- Staffing issues are a continual problem. However, there are now two vets on staff, and they take in fewer animals than before and don't serve as many animals. How are they not able to serve as many animals?
- Compared ACC to Oakland Animal Shelter (OAS). OAS smaller budget but served more animals and utilized fosters more efficiently. OAS also posts lost cats on their site.
- Transparency – many found out about the healthy cats admission policy and ACC not taking in healthy cats when they tried to bring in a cat or report a lost cat. Why was this policy not communicated clearly to the public? There are also contradicting stories on cat rescue from ACC social media sites.
- Mission statement - Why the change? Can members of the public provide input? ACC policy contradicts the current health code policy.
- Do not agree that the policy is humane and also believe that the data collection to formulate the policy is flawed and sample sizes too small.
- Community cats vs feral cats defined. Healthy cats that are not feral are being left outside which is leading to a population explosion of cats.
- Need to engage with the community to find lost cats.
- SF cat community volunteers out in the fields are experts on outdoor cats. Need to listen to volunteers. The volunteers have been retaliated against.
- Asked that the commission write a letter of support like the June 2019 letter.

*Questions/comments from commissioners*

Commissioner Fortier commented that Dr. O'Neill addressed some issues with inconsistencies in policy execution and that the s/n #'s were answered.

Commissioner Tobin suggested ACC re-open lines of communication with cat rescues. ACC and volunteer rescues have complementary skills. Second, is ACC using citizen apps like Nextdoor for lost cats?

Director Donohue said ACC only posts public service announcements on NextDoor and prefers to use their site for lost animals.

Commissioner Irani asked for clarification on the lost cat policy. Director Donohue responded saying bringing lost cats into the shelter makes it harder for the owners to find them as cats are usually close to home.

What can ACC do to better support reunification in the field? Director Donohue suggested more cats should be microchipped. But the free microchip clinics are hard to organize with staffing issues. Also, maybe re-visit the website information. What can ACC do to increase outreach to the community because people don't know to come to the shelter? Director Donohue mentioned El Paso has a test project to put a microchip scanning station in a dog park.

Alena Ja mentioned that any vet will scan a lost pet for free.

Commissioner Ozernoy's question - re: ACC website, in the "lost and found" pets section, there is information on what to do, but how does the average person know if a cat has a home? How can we educate people to fully understand the proper track for a cat?

ACC will scan for a chip. Director Donohue acknowledged it is a gray area in how a public member knows the status of a cat. Commissioner Ozernoy suggested a flow chart, and Director Donohue mentioned ACC wants to revamp the website to update information responding to gray areas such as these.

Chair Torres asked questions about the ACC website. Director Donohue explained ACC's shelter software and the website. Friends of ACC pays for some software and web design/hosting outside ACC's limited systems.

Commissioner Tobin asked about free microchip clinics asked about the new veterinary offices in San Francisco and SFVMA. Director Donohue said SFVMA doesn't have staff. No SFVMA members are willing to do it, including new veterinary facilities. Director Donohue acknowledged they are working on it.

Commissioner Irani asked about how ACO's are trained to respond to found cats. Director Donohue acknowledged inconsistencies, and in response, they have organized the internal group to rewrite the guidelines. Director Donohue also noted that the public often learns how to give a dishonest answer to get ACC to take in an animal. Nevertheless, ACC and everyone wants to do what is right for the animal.

Chair Torres asked about the makeup of the internal group. Director Donohue said it is all internal staff.

Commissioner Van Horn spoke about the new veterinary hospitals in SF. Most are corporate-owned and will not offer to help unless they turn a profit. He reminded the Commission that San Francisco is still in need of veterinarians and vet techs.

Also noted are different philosophies that shape policy, and they are out there regarding cat intake policy.

Alena Jay - commented. Wants to reiterate that if the policy is 20 years old, the policy needs to be communicated to the public better.

Maria Conlon - healthy cats in danger - ACC needs to respond and take them in. MC also acknowledged that there are organizations in protest of these policies (OAS, PHS, San Jose, etc). Virginia Donohue said she would confirm what these organizations are doing.

Chair Torres - asked whether there are any changes we can (in SF) make to help healthy cats. Director Donohue stated that the policy science still applies, and they stand by it, but ACC can innovate while remaining consistent with the science. ACC is using science to drive policy by tracking data to support the efficacy of any policy.

**Public comment** - # of callers reiterated their dissatisfaction with ACC's healthy cat intake policy.

In summary - Chair Torres - Commission will continue the discussion and meet with ACC and cat rescue partners.

## **6. Old Business**

### **A. Reporting from Animal Care & Control [Discussion Item] [Commissioner Torres and Director Donohue]**

Animal Care & Control will report regarding outcomes for animals and ongoing operations.

Director Donohue provided the shelter population numbers for the day, and presented the July – September 2022 Quarterly Report.

**Public Comment** - One commenter reiterated the need to take work together to relieve the financial burden.

### **B. Commission Governance [Discussion/Action Item] [Commissioners Torres]**

Commission voted on officers' roles. Chairperson Torres, Vice Chair Ozernoy, and Secretary Tobin all reappointed to officer roles.

## **7. Items to be put on the agenda for future Commission meetings**

- No meeting in December - the next meeting is Thursday, January 12.
- Will revisit/being considered - Cats and admission policy. Helping find lost cats and dogs. Officer Sutherland from SFPD. Work plans.

## **8. Adjournment** - Approx. 10 pm