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LISTENING SESSION MINUTES

Meeting of May 1, 2013 – 6:00pm
Meeting held at:
Wauwatosa Library
Firefly Room
7635 W North Ave.
Wauwatosa, WI 53213

Present: Mr. Ronald Hayward, Village of West Milwaukee
Mr. Don Schaewe, City of Milwaukee
Mr. Derik Summerfield, City of Wauwatosa
Ms. Karen Sparapani, Executive Director (MADACC)
Ms. Lorraine Sweeney, Shelter Supervisor (MADACC)
Ms. Jessica Huber, Volunteer & Outreach Coordinator (MADACC)

1. Introductions

Ms. Sparapani introduced the MADACC board members and staff who were present.

Ms. Sparapani introduced herself, giving an overview of her background prior to coming to MADACC.

2. Overview

Ms. Sparapani explained that MADACC is an misunderstood organization by many members of the public. She stated the goals of MADACC (taken from the website), explained the many services MADACC offers to the 19 municipalities of Milwaukee County and gave an overview of the year to date statistics.

Ms. Sparapani gave an overview of planned changes, to include a “Day 8” mentality for all adoptable animals, new cleaning protocols, new volunteer opportunities and changes to the volunteer program, and improving the environment for the shelter cats.

3. Submitted Questions/Responses

The following questions were submitted to Ms. Sparapani via email.

When I donate to MADACC does it go into general operating revenue or is it earmarked for programs designed to save lives?

When someone donates to MADACC they have a few options. One, is to donate to Friends of MADACC, our fundraising group who raises funds for spay/neuter programs, outreach and for things that make the lives of the animals at MADACC better while they are with us. People who donate to MADACC generically will have that money put into our operating fund, but most people choose to donate to the MADACC spay/neuter program or shelter improvement fund.

Would like to know if you have plans to have volunteers come in, get trained and socialize the numerous cats being held at Madacc?

Yes, our new volunteer program has a few new opportunities – like the Kitty Concierge, cat socializing, and photographers. We wanted to point out that condo cat socializing was reinstated in January 2013.

How can the public be assured that ALL animals at MADACC are receiving appropriate and timely treatment for illness and injury when we had seen personal examples of that NOT being the case in the recent past, ranging from untreated broken bones to severe flea bite dermatitis not treated for over a week?

Cannot speak about the past. I do know that it is the policy of most shelters to not do expensive surgeries, like fixing broken legs, until the animal becomes the property of the organization. If an owner shows up and cannot afford to pay for the vet treatment, it creates an awkward situation. Since I have been at MADACC, every animal that I am aware of with medical issues that are treatable has been treated as soon as possible, or transferred to a group who has the resources for treatment and rehabilitation. Shelter from the Storm, who should be highly commended, has taken many of our animals with high cost medical needs, most recently a pitbull female with a broken femur, who was kept comfortable during her stay and received excellent care by the staff, as well as a Shihtzu who needed an eye removed.

Who is doing the evaluations and temperament testing of cats/dogs?

Lorraine Sweeney, the former Shelter Operations Manager from Elmbrook Humane Society who is trained at doing shelter behavior testing, and who is constantly keeping current on new research and techniques in order to administer testing in a proper manner and getting as accurate a result as possible. Please know, however, these tests are simply a snapshot in time, and no test can accurately predict the behavior for life of an animal.

Are the animals being evaluated in a consistent manner?

Yes, currently the animals are. However, that being said – every animal has to be judged as an individual. We also work with breed rescues who have certain specific tests that should be done on the animals of their breed. For instance, Rottie rescue asks us NOT to food bowl test.

Has any attempt been made to rehabilitate any of the animals who fail the temp. testing but are not determined to be a real danger to the public? Have any local trainers been asked to lend a hand or expertise to help dogs that are currently not recommended for transfer or adoption but with some help from a trainer or group of trained volunteers could perhaps avoid euthanasia?

No, MADACC does not have the resources to provide meaningful behavior modification at our facility. In fact, most rescues and shelters will also not pull an animal who has failed the temperament test. Sadly, there are so many animals without dangerous behavior issues that we have to focus on those animals. Some shelters, like HAWS and EBHS have trainers and behaviorists on staff that can work with some animals, but I would think not ones that have had an absolute FAIL on a test. As well, to have an animal held at MADACC for behavior modification which can take months, not guaranteed to be successful, and we do not have the resources to do it right ultimately will take us kennel space that needs to be used by an incoming stray, or safekeep animal. When there are minor issues, or breed related behaviors, some

groups are willing to work on those animals, and we are willing to be upfront with those groups about the behavior. We do ask groups to take these animals on, but most groups are in the same boat as we are.

What is the protocol when determining which animals go on a transfer list, which are open to adoption, and which will be euthanized? It seems inconsistent and was frustrating and difficult for me as a potential adopter and a foster volunteer when the previous shelter manager was there.

Again, I cannot speak for protocols in the past, but currently we are striving for this:

1. An animal is placed on the transfer list if it has passed a temperament test and we have a good idea of any medical conditions that a transfer partner should be made aware of.
2. Currently, only cats and pitbulls are available for adoption at MADACC. We are focusing on these populations as they are the least likely to be transferred out. Those animals are the only ones that will be in the MADACC foster program, as well. As well, if a finder is interested in adopting an animal they bring to MADACC we will adopt that animal to them.
3. Euthanasia decisions for medical reasons are made exclusively by a veterinarian with input from and the entire medical department and the Shelter Supervisor. Sometimes these decisions are made at emergency vets where good Samaritans or our staff may bring an animal in for treatment for injuries after being picked up. Euthanasia decisions based on behavior are made by the Shelter Supervisor and based on many factors including temperament testing, or obvious aggressive behavior, and input from other staff and personnel including potential rescue groups. Decisions to end the life of an animal are not taken lightly here, and we are working very hard to reduce the number of animals that are euthanized.

What are the clear and consistent protocols in place to determine whether or not an animal can go into foster care? In the past I was allowed to foster pregnant cats, whose mothers and kittens all went to Elmbrook, but the previous shelter manager said the protocols had "changed" and all pregnant cats were either euthanized or spayed, which made no sense since they all had a placement after foster. How can the protocol change so drastically?

This is a difficult issue. We feel that if we can spay a cat before she gives birth it is the best option. We have a shelter full of adult cats that sit here that there are no homes for and we have to focus on the ones that are here. That is the same procedure we have in place for dogs as well. Today's puppies and kittens are tomorrow's forgotten shelter adults that are at risk for euthanasia. It is very common for shelters to do this. In addition to the added population, there are medical risks involved for the mother, and the babies of pregnant shelter animals. Many fosters are not able to manage a birth effectively. Kittens and puppies die regularly, which is very hard on fosters. At EBHS we always would spay/neuter pregnant cats and dogs as long as the vet felt that it was medically appropriate – not too close to the end. I do know that at one point at MADACC, rescues only wanted the kittens and were leaving the mothers behind to be euthanized.

Is there any program to socialize feral cats being considered?

No, there are no programs to socialize feral cats. While many feral cats can be tamed enough to take food from your hand, they are still wild animals. We try to get kittens away from feral moms to put into foster so they can have a chance at being tamed, but after a certain age, it becomes difficult to impossible to make a feral cat into a companion. While many people enjoy feeding and interacting with feral cats outside, it is not a wise use of resources for a shelter to focus on taming feral cats. The only feral cat program out there right now is the WHS program which allows residents to manage feral cat colonies.

Who determines, and how, whether or not an animal is available to the public for adoption?

Medical and behavior assessments determine which pits and cats can go into our foster program and ultimately adopted out by MADACC. All other adoptable animals will be offered to shelters and rescues for their adoption programs.

- A. Why can't dogs be walked and socialized sooner upon intake and why are the small dogs never on the dog walking list? I know they get transferred more easily, but 10 days shut inside is terrible.
- B. Regarding any animal that ends up at MADACC - why is there no interaction with them until the hold period is up? At least I believe that's what I heard at the meeting on Tuesday. That has to cause a ton of stress. How can the animal's temperament be assessed after being stressed out for 7 days?

There are few shelters that will walk dogs while they are on stray hold. These dogs are NOT the property of MADACC and belong to someone else. That means if they are lost, stolen, bite or are injured – that is the responsibility of the stray hold organization. How would you feel if you came to get your dog, only to find out that it nipped and broke skin and now had to stay 10 days for a bite quarantine? How would you feel if you showed up at MADACC to find out that we lost your dog when a dog walker accidentally dropped the leash? What if that animal was safe at MADACC but now had been hit by a car. MADACC is holding onto lost property, that does not belong to us. We have a responsibility to keep those animals safe. We are hoping to be able to make some adjustments to allow all animals to be in outside kennels a part of the day in the future.

Animals are quite resilient, and we do not wait 7 days to work with them. We handle them every day during cleaning. The vet does rounds every day, and now our staff works to temperament test them so that they are able to leave as soon as possible.

Small dogs are on the walk list now because the weather is warmer – most small dogs do not like the cold pavement. Just put Drake the Chi on there this past weekend.

What is being done to improve the quality of life in the kennels - fresh air, less wet bedding, dog brushing and grooming, enrichment toys, more walks, use of outdoor area????

First, we are changing the cleaning protocols and getting volunteers to work with the kennel staff to help clean and dry kennels to prevent any animal being put into a wet kennel. We already groom the animals that need it, though our grooming skills leave a lot to be desired. We are trying to get volunteer groomers and bathers right now. We are working to get all animals out on day 8 to reduce long term stress, but all animals are given toys and other enrichment opportunities when they are available. Each dog is supposed to have one toy a day in the kennel. We are trying to have three walk shifts each day so animals who are housebroken can keep up their skills. We will also be trying to use the outdoor areas and adding outdoor areas for animals to all get out once a day.

What are the plans for building improvements? I have heard that the building will be fully paid off soon, so will funds be directed to building an addition, improved kennels, etc?

Yes, MADACC will be debt free by the end of the year. We have no plans to build an addition at this time, but are looking at creating some additional outdoor space right off the kennels which would allow every single animal some time in the fresh air and allow the kennel staff to return the animal to the same kennel each day after cleaning. That will also help in shelter sanitation and reducing disease transmission. If we can get to a place where we can consistently keep our population down, we can explore changing out our animal housing so it would, again, be easier to keep clean and allow animals to have more movement and space while in holding. MADACC and FOM are going to be working together in the future to address additional improvements in the facility and raising funds for those projects.

Are area rescues and transfer services being utilized to their full capacity by MADACC to transfer as many animals as possible and take advantage of all the services that already exist?

Yes, we have a day 8 plan now, and are constantly reaching out to the other rescues and shelter groups to make sure we do the best we can for every single animal. Lorraine and I have been working with other shelters for many years and because of those relationships we can reach out easier and work with shelters/rescues to help facilitate the transfers

- A. Who should be responding to calls from the public about adoptions? I have urged many people to go to MADACC to adopt, but after weeks of unreturned calls and emails to various people, they gave up and went elsewhere and adopted easily in a day or two at the most. Too bad because these were professional, dedicated, educated people who gave other agency's pets wonderful homes.
- B. Here I recently went to a pet store looking for a particular product. Another customer was also looking for something in the same area. We started chatting about our dogs. Whenever I have a conversation with anyone, I always bring up that I have adopted two dogs from MADACC. She was shocked when I told her I walked in and looked at both my dogs and adopted them. This lady called about adopting from MADACC and was told you don't adopt out to the public.
- C. What are the plans for the Madacc adoption program? Will the public be able to adopt dogs (pits especially) that are on the transfer list and have good evaluations? I personally know of several people who have been interested in a Madacc dog from the website and were turned away. I realize Madacc is not set up as a typical adoption center but allowing the public to adopt transfer list dogs would definitely improve the save rate, especially since so many rescues don't take pits.

It is unfortunate when callers are not treated in the way they should be, or when people are given incorrect information. This is not exclusive to MADACC by any stretch of the imagination. MADACC is an incredibly busy facility, especially the front desk, and with the emergencies we deal with I can see how adoptions might be put on the backburner while the staff is dealing with lots of other situations and people at the counter. Because we do not have the staff trained for adoptions, which are not as easy as they sound even in an open adoption shelter, nor do we have the space to allow people to meet many of our animals who are not on stray hold, we have taken a long look at the adoption program here. Because of these limitations, we are not looking to expand our adoption program and we will be focusing exclusively on the adoptions of animals by the people who found the animals, and adoptions for cats and pitbulls. As you correctly point out, most other agencies who specialize in adoptions can facilitate these adoptions much more efficiently. Our front office staff works with IP adopters, and internal adoptions for our current fosters.

Are you afraid that outside groups may destroy the image of MADACC, and the public will only recall negative messages such as was displayed at the Pet Expo? How will that affect the ability to raise funds and support for you and the goals you and FOM have for MADACC?

Negative press rarely reaps any rewards. As I stated earlier, MADACC is a very misunderstood organization and it is my hope that we move forward we can better educate the public about our unique role in the animal welfare community here.

What are the plans for increasing the return to owner rate? I have been to several meetings where Lost Dogs of Wisconsin has begged and offered to help. I am sure Karen has been in touch with them since she started and has plans underway...would love to hear more! :)

We are going to have Lost Dogs of Wisconsin come in to train our front office staff, and our new volunteer greeters in an effort to be able to help our in-house efforts for reuniting lost animals with their families. We are also taking an idea from Wisconsin Humane Society and having a FB page called Strays of Milwaukee where people can see the animals we have taken in, and to post lost dog reports and photos. We are also having MADACC listed in the blue section of the phone book, in the government pages and the Hispanic Yellow Pages so people have another place to find our contact information to report lost and found animals.

How is the public being informed about the Listening Session? I believe that was mentioned at Tuesday's meeting also, but I could not hear the answer beyond 'newspaper'.

We are putting the listening session information on our website, and the FOM Facebook page. We will be submitting the info to the Patch newspapers, and the other public calendars. The municipality will be posting on their website as well, as I know Tosa has done for us. These listening sessions are meant to publicly address concerns citizens have expressed about the operations at MADACC and to educate the public about MADACC and what we do.

When will you have a new website? I bet we could put together a group who would donate their time to do this or do it for very very little. Website/social media are key to getting dogs seen, embraced and placed.

We are in the planning stages of a new website. Since we are a little different than a traditional shelter, we have to focus mainly on reuniting animals with their families. We need to also communicate with the community to give them the information about the services we offer, such as low cost spay neuter, vaccine clinics and educational information. One part of our new website is going to be a mirror version in Spanish so we can communicate more effectively with the Spanish speaking members of our community. We are open to having some help with this project. With so many other changes going on, this was placed on the backburner, but once we have things running more smoothly, we will focus more on the website. And, as always, my budget for this kind of thing is zero. But I will bet we can get enough people to help us do it for free...

Are Kuranda beds being considered for all the kennels? I've heard that dogs have damaged them when provided in the past & that's why they have not been used again, but all the best shelters & animal control facilities use them for their dogs & have few issues. Dogs are dogs. There are Kurandas available that are practically chew resistant. It would cut down on all the manpower needed for laundry, cut down on disease, they are more comfortable for the dogs & won't end up completely full of excrement like some of the blankets are. The grates in the cages can be removed so the kurandas can fit. Easy cleaning for the kennel staff too.

Kuranda beds were attempted to be used in the kennels, and they were only able to fit adequately in kennel 1. As you stated, removing grates allowed them to fit in the other three kennels, but, if we removed the grates for the kuranda beds to fit, animals were able to get their feet into the cleaning canals, and that would directly expose them to more disease and possible injury. Because the dogs are moved from kennel to kennel each day, this meant all the beds had to be washed every day and were not easy to clean and completely dry. I used them successfully at EBHS, where we also eliminated the use of blankets for dogs unless they needed surgery and used them for recovery. Cats always had blankets. I do not personally like the current system of blankets in the kennels, I find them to spread more disease in a shelter than anything else. Again, there is no easy solution to our housing issues. Reducing the number of days animals stay with us is of some help, but I think eventually we will need to completely replace the housing for all animals, and this will be done in a much more thoughtful manner.

Will Madacc be purchasing a bulk amount of Nylabones for the dogs of all different sizes since FOM has gotten approval from the board for a discount agreement with Nylabone?

Friends of MADACC is buying more nylabones. Many of the dogs render them unsanitizable after use, so the ones we cannot salvage are disposed of. We are always looking for more ways, even using Do it Yourself projects to create non-destroyable and multiple use items for the dogs.

Will classical music be used in the kennels to calm the dogs & possibly the cats (not sure if that is calming for cats)?

Yes, we have "dog" specific musical choices, not all of them are classical. We use the radio sometimes and try to put on soothing music as much as possible. We are working on an MP3 system now to keep the music consistent.

I know MADACC originated out of a need for the communities of Milwaukee County to have a 'pound' for stray/lost animals. There are 19 cities and villages within Milwaukee County; do all of them have a voice in how MADACC operates?

Yes, each municipality has a representative on our full board of directors.

What entity oversees MADACC?

The Operations Committee directly oversees MADACC. The Board of Directors oversees the Ops Committee.

Who appoints the BOD?

Each municipality appoints their own representative.

What entity pays the staff? Who hires, who fires?

MADACC has a budget funded by the municipalities and has a payroll service. Payroll checks are from MADACC's operating account. The ED hires and fires some staff, like how I hired Lorraine. The Department Managers hire and fire their staff. The Operations Committee participates in some recruiting and hiring, as was done when they hired me. I believe they also participated in the hiring of our veterinarian.

Shouldn't the facility be a county run organization?

When MADACC was conceived, it was felt that an Intergovernmental model would be the best route to go. It affords the municipalities to all get an equal say in the operations and budget at MADACC and allows MADACC to directly interact with the municipalities.

Why does 'Mac' sit with the BOD members instead of the staff during BOD meetings? Is he a BOD member?

I cannot provide any insight into why John McDowell sits where he does. I know I have been asked as the ED to sit with the board members, specifically next to the president during board meetings. Perhaps that was done when he was the interim as well? No, John McDowell is not on the board of directors, but he has been here since before day 1 helping to set up the operations and is very familiar with many of the board members because of the length of their relationship.

Where do I find a listing of BOD members?

We are working to finalize the current list, and the alternates, and once that is complete we will look into posting it where the public can find it, perhaps on the website.

What can we, your public, do to help?

SPAY AND NEUTER!

MICROCHIP!

ENCOURAGE LICENSING!

VOLUNTEER!

DONATE!

FOSTER for one of our placement partners

ADOPT from our placement partners, or if you are looking for a cat or pitbull, we can help you find a companion