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**LISTENING SESSION MINUTES**

Meeting of June 27, 2013 – 6:00pm  
Meeting held at:  
West Allis City Hall Room 128  
7525 W Greenfield Avenue  
West Allis, WI 53214

**Present:** Mr. Ronald Hayward, Village of West Milwaukee  
Mr. Paul Ziehler, City of West Allis  
Mr. Eric Pearson, City of Milwaukee  
Ms. Karen Sparapani, Executive Director (MADACC)  
Ms. Lorraine Sweeney, Shelter Supervisor (MADACC)  
Ms. Jessica Huber, Volunteer & Outreach Coordinator (MADACC)

**1. Overview**

Ms. Sparapani gave a brief overview of MADACC's mission and the services MADACC provides to the public.

**2. Submitted Questions/Responses**

In an article I just read, the director said that pitbulls are euthanized the most and that many people will not consider adopting them. Making statements like 'most people won't adopt a pitbull', is pretty negative and is not going to help change their image or help save more of their lives. That statement really reinforces the stereotypes, especially when it's coming from the ED of the biggest shelter in our state. People look to her as the expert, especially since she has a lot of experience running Elmbrook as well as she did. Can MADACC start changing their tone on this topic?

I was asked "Which animals need the most help?" My answer was:

"We euthanize pit bulls more than any other breed.

Last year, out of 1,783 dogs euthanized, 1,396 were pit bulls or pittty mixes. There are not enough adopters for them and shelters and rescues are full. Many adopters will not even consider bringing one into their homes because of public perception and the difficulty with insurance and landlords. Cats are also in need. Out of 6,468 cats brought in last year, we euthanized 3,514."

While you may consider that statement negative, it is also true.

I do not think my comment reflects on the image of pitbulls, I think it reflects more on the attitudes and opinions of the public. I also think that it might put the thought in someone's head to consider adopting a pitbull if they hear that pits need help getting out of shelters more than any other type of dog. When someone comes over to me with a beautiful dog of almost any other breed and they tell me they "saved" it from a rescue or shelter, I think to myself how that dog did not need to be saved. It was going to get easily adopted.

I believe every dog needs to be marketed as an individual. That is why all the dogs on our walk list are given names and we describe their individual personalities because that describes them to shelters and rescue partners, and maybe to potential fosters and adopters. We also use videos of each animal we are trying to market to adopters and other shelters to help personalize them.

I do think people need to know what is going on in the community. If people are not aware of the challenges that MADACC faces when it comes to pits and cats, then we cannot come together as a community to address these problems.

At the end of the day, it remains true that most adopters do not look for pitbulls to adopt. At EBHS we adopted out so many pits because people met them face to face and saw them as individuals and as the excellent companions that they are. Pits, like any other dog, sell themselves to adopters with their personality. Trying to talk someone into adopting a pit is usually fruitless, but when they fall in love with a dog, 99% of the time they do not care what the breed it.

Also, how do you know that those dogs were in fact 'pit bulls'? Are DNA tests being done on them or is someone saying that's a dog with a short coat and some muscles so it must be a pitbull? What method are you using to determine a dogs breed? Visual identification is not a reliable method. While DNA tests probably aren't a possibility, most likely the bulk of dogs in there are mixed breeds and mutts.

I don't.

o we DNA test every pitty looking dog that comes through here? Absolutely not. Is every pitty looking dog at MADACC a pit? Absolutely not. But, if a dog is pitty looking, that is what it is considered by the general public. We can try and say a dog is a boxer/lab mix, but then people say a shelter is lying and trying to pass off a pit as something else. Better people understand that the dog might be a pit or pit mix and then let them decide if they want to adopt. We have had people return dogs and puppies they adopted because someone else said that they thought the dog looked pitty and we did not say the dog might be and they felt we were trying to trick them to get rid of a dog. Or that they would never have adopted it they knew the dog might be a pit. Landlords, condos associations have many restrictions as well – if they think it is a pit, it is a pit.

Better to err on the side of caution. I would rather have someone think they have a pit, even if it isn't than have someone feel lied to like we were trying to hide the fact that a dog is a pit or pit mix.

I've seen multiple posts by Brew City Bully club claiming they will be sending people into MADACC to "walk, train, rehab, socialize, and rescue" eligible court case dogs of Milwaukee. They are actively pursuing donations to fund this program. Is this true??? While I don't follow the court case dogs closely to the best of my knowledge not only is the kennel off limits and kept locked at all times, the case is still open with no end in sight. Will they have special privileges and access to these dogs? Thank you for allowing my question.

Brew City Bullies have been around for several years, and are one of the few rescues solely dedicated to pits. I have talked to Brew City Bullies about the needs we have for pits in the community. Pits often have behavior issues that can be worked with by people with the proper training and a facility that lends itself to this kind of work. Obviously, the current and future court case dogs are a big concern for us as well.

While most dogs do not stay in the system this long, when they leave an animal control facility they need a place to go for transition and training. Brew City Bullies is looking at long term needs to address in the community, and there are no communities that I am aware of that do not have issues with pits that need some behavior modification.

I urged them to consider creating a program based on the one in Chicago where they work with court case dogs after they are signed off. Milwaukee, and for that matter, the state of Wisconsin does not have resources for pits with behavior issues and those animals are at high risk for euthanasia. Since we have a need in the community for resources for animals with behavior issues and they were willing and enthusiastic about doing so I was very encouraging of them to develop a program like that. While I doubt that working with court case dogs will be the bulk of the work that they do, I think that the program will deal with pits in need of behavior modification.

No, no one is having special privileges or access to these dogs.

Are the euthanasia reasons being logged and tracked? And what are the reason codes/categories?

By law, using our euthanasia drug (which is a controlled substance) requires us to log each animal that is euthanized, and the amount used. Internally, we do keep track of reasons for euthanasia. Currently, these are the reasons we use to categorize animal euthanasia:

- Behavior
- MADACC Evaluation
- Medical/Treatable
- Medical/Non-treatable
- Feral
- Owner Request
- URI
- Parvo
- Bite Case
- Time and Space

Have you considered developing a program so that inmates at the local prison could work with dogs at MADACC that have behavior issues and nurse orphaned kittens and puppies that need to be bottle fed?

I have not considered those programs for MADACC. Orphaned kittens and puppies are not a huge problem at MADACC that we would need a program to deal with that population.

That said, at one point the Sheriff's Department had contacted us and mentioned that they were potentially looking into starting a program such as this, but we do not have the staff with the ability to oversee or to manage a program like this, so it would be something better handled by another group with those resources that we can be a participant in. I am open to participating in a program of that nature, so if we have the opportunity, we would definitely take part.

Have there been any developments regarding the court case dogs?

Please update us on the status of the Court Case Dogs. What is being done? Where are we in the process of getting these dogs out of MADACC for rehab? Are they being allowed fresh air and sunshine? Human interaction?

There have been no developments in this case. MADACC has no legal standing to do anything to facilitate the release of the animals. Currently, the only option open to MADACC is to release the dogs back to the owners.

These dogs are handled by the same staff every single day. They have daily human interaction and are given enrichment opportunities as much as possible. Until the dogs become the property of MADACC we have limited ability to do much of anything else with them.

If the dogs become the property of MADACC we have contacted the ASPCA who has a team that will come in and work with us to determine which of them are candidates for rehabilitation and help us with placement.

**When a stray animal is brought into MADACC, how much time elapses before the animal is checked by a vet? If the animal is clearly in pain or ill does it get immediate and necessary care (ie: pain medication, wound care, etc)??**

Animals are looked over by our Medical Team at intake. If an animal is injured or in pain, they are given immediate treatment and pain medication. If an animal requires veterinary care during a time when our veterinarian is not on duty, we take the animal to an emergency veterinarian for necessary diagnostics and treatment.

Should the nature of an injury warrant an early release to a transfer partner for more in-depth medical care, we do explore that option as well.

Additionally, our vet does rounds 5 days per week, our certified vet techs do them on the two days that she is off each week. We have a vet in the building on one of those days who does spay neuter surgeries and who will look at animals with issues on intake.

**How is it decided which animals are next for euthanization? Who makes this decision?**

This question was asked at our last session, so I am going to use the same answer I did then: Euthanasia decisions for medical reasons are made exclusively by a veterinarian with input from 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.

**Question for 6/27 session, how is the Homestretch program going? How many animals have moved onto WHS thru it? How many fosters have signed up to help?**

Not as well as we had hoped. There has not been the enthusiastic response from the public to become fosters as we would have liked. We are working on making the process less cumbersome, in the event that has been a deterrent to people from signing up.

That said, WHS has been able to pull in animals directly to their shelter as opposed to putting them into foster. To date, we have probably gotten 15 animals through the foster portion of the program, but ideally, we would like to have many more in the future.

WHS is here every single day and pull at least once a day, 6 days a week. We are looking at ways to save many more animals together. We know that together we should be able to save every adoptable animal in Milwaukee County.

If a lost pet with a microchip from the Wisconsin Humane Society ends up at MADACC, and the owner doesn't come for them, what happens to that animal?

If an animal is chipped to a shelter, or rescue, that animal will be sent back to that shelter or rescue once it is off of stray hold. It is rare that a group that adopted out an animal does not come back for it. Wisconsin has an animal for life philosophy and groups will take back an animal they adopted out any time for the life of the animal. Untraceable, out-of-state chipped animals usually end up in our adoption program, or offered to other shelters

I would like to know how many tests you perform on dogs to determine whether or not they are adoptable and the duration of time those tests take to complete? Also, during testing, do you take into consideration the possibility that the dog(s) are stressed/scared from being away from their home, and therefore aren't performing normally? You put down a very sweet, one-year old Beagle that I turned in, who got along with my dogs and cats and who my parents (who have no other pets or children besides myself) were ready and willing to adopt! I wish you would have given him a chance. Heartbreaking.

We give two tests to dogs here which are industry standard tests. The initial SAFER test is one that all dogs get to give a first picture of what the animals responses to people will be like. We test things like hugging, handling feet, checking teeth. Then there is a secondary test given. This test is more involved and you get a better idea of what an animal's responses to stimuli will be.

All shelters test in essentially the same way. If an animal fails with a bite, there is usually no working with that animal – at least not with any shelter that I am personally aware of. Other more benign behaviors are successfully worked with all the time.

Tests can last from 15 minutes to hours and days. We had one pitbull that we had to test over several days and bring in another trainer to determine if the dog had dog aggression because one end of her body was saying one thing and the other end was saying another. In the end, she was declared NOT to have dog aggression, was transferred out to a shelter, and successfully adopted and is doing great. We do not take these life and death tests lightly.

Since you are asking about a particular animal, I will respond to that particular situation. That one year old Beagle seemed very nice, and no one could have been more surprised when the dog actually BIT the hand on food bowl and snapped at the tester when they tried to take a treat out of the dog's mouth. Dogs RARELY bite on food bowl – and I cannot stress that enough. In fact, biting is the only way we fail a dog on the food bowl portion of the test. We have pretty lenient standards by shelter standards on food bowl as we do not fail for growling, nudging, gulping the food down faster – which in some shelters will cause a fail. However, this dog was tested several times and each time the result was the same.

Once we know a dog will bite, we cannot let the dog be adopted out. We are charged with maintaining animal safety in Milwaukee County and it would be irresponsible to put that dog out into the public where someone may be bitten. While there are those that say letting an adopter know that a dog bites is sufficient, we feel that once we are made aware of that fact, we are liable or can be held liable for any bites that dog makes for the rest of its life. No shelter or rescue would adopt that dog out. There is also the belief that is we have an adopter sign a form saying they know the dog bites and is aware of that, then all is fine. However, what about the people that live next door? Or in the community? They did not get to sign a document saying it is OK for those people to adopt a dog that bites, and could potentially bite them, or one of their children.

Bottom line is that once a dog bites in response to stimuli, there is no way we can ignore that behavior. It was heartbreaking – it really was – to have to put that dog down. But, it is the only ethical and moral thing we can do in that position.

There are lots of what shelters would consider “unadoptable” dogs living successfully in homes. Those dogs are managed properly, and never cause problems, and that is fine. However, if a dog with behavior problems is brought to a shelter, and those behavior problems involve biting, there is no shelter that I know that will put that dog on the adoption floor. No one comes in looking for a dog who bites or who has the potential to bite.

Few people who work in animal welfare have the time and skills necessary to manage a dog with aggression issues successfully and for a lifetime, never mind the general public.