

Vermont Animal Cruelty Task Force Meeting Minutes - APPROVED
 October 6, 2015, 9-12 p.m.
 Pavilion Office Building, 4th Floor Conference Room
 109 State Street, Montpelier, VT

Attendance

Member	Representing
Joanne Bourbeau	Vermont Humane Federation
Pam Dalley	Dept. for Children and Families
NA	VT State Police
NA	VT Federation of Dog Clubs
NA	VT Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs
NA	Dept. of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs
Trevor Whipple	VT Police Chiefs Association
Deb Loring	Large Animal Humane Society
Paula Russell	VT Animal Control Association
NA	Governor's Office
Erika Holm	Domestic Animal Humane Society (CVHS)
Bill Brady	VT Veterinary Medical Association
Kristin Haas	VT Agency of Ag, Food, and Markets
NA	VT Constables Association
Patti Lewis	Vermont Municipal Clerks and Treasurers' Assoc.
Barry Londeree	Public
Debra Martin	Public
Charles Brown	Public
Karen Blow	Public
Cindy Cross-Greenia	Public
Kyle Pochemus	Public
TJ Anderson	Public, VT Criminal Justice Training Council
John Peaveler	Public

- Meeting was called to order at 9:10 a.m. by chair Joanne Bourbeau.
- Members and other present introduced themselves.
- Minutes from the previous meeting on September 15, 2015, were read. Minutes were approved by voice vote following the correction of the spelling of Kristin Haas's name.
- Those in attendance from the public were offer the opportunity to speak.
- Cindy Cross-Greenia stated that she believes that humane societies generally do a good job of enforcement. But she is concerned about some people being unfairly targeted, the subject of witch hunts, and used to raise funds through donations. She noted that there are disagreements among horse owners as to proper housing standards for horses. She said that while some ACOs may not be properly trained or experienced, they know locals and their animals best, and that people who do not know about horses should not be investigating. She recommended that an independent non-

profit be set up to collect donations for the reimbursement of cruelty costs so that funding is not collected by individual rescues.

- Deb Martin spoke of how she and others have been battling for improved cruelty laws for a long but keep getting knocked back. Said we need consistent standards that can be applied by those in charge of enforcement. Referenced the Williamstown situation where officials notified the abusers of the investigation as an example of the need for reform. Offered to provide assistance in this effort.
- Kyle Pochemus said there needs to be much more clarity for horse owners so they know what they need to do to be in compliance. Said she had contacted veterinarians and the Dept. of Agriculture but never got clear standards. Enforcement officers need to be educated and offer assistance, and horse owners should not fear constant harassment.
- Joanne Bourbeau commented that clearer and more consistent training have been a part of the discussions to date and that the purpose of the Task Force is to address those problems described by the public speakers.
- Deb Loring reviewed the format to be used for the final report. Raised a question from the previous meeting's minutes about whether training should be required for both ACOs and humane agents. The members of the Task Force agreed that it should. Kristin Haas said we should look to other states for examples, and Trevor Whipple noted that specific training requirements need not be included in the report or potential legislation, but instead left up to agencies in charge of implementation.
- Deb Loring continued to review the other components of the report outline, noting that sentencing recommendations needed to be discussed because they are inconsistent across jurisdictions. Joanne Bourbeau also noted the lack of a rehabilitation program for animal abuse offenders that could be required for those convicted. Other issues for the report include recommendations for improved data collection, funding options, clarification of the Dept. of Agriculture's "consult" and "enforcement" responsibilities, and liability protections for rescue groups that participate in enforcement actions.
- Joanne then asked TJ Anderson to discuss the possibility of improved training opportunities for law enforcement.
- TJ Anderson stated that the Police Academy is currently reevaluating changes to the training requirements for officers. The ideal would be to get animal cruelty training into the base Level 3 training program for full-time officers.
- Discussion turned to whether ACOs should complete training if they are unable (due to town ordinance) or unwilling to enforce laws beyond those pertaining to dogs. Joanne Bourbeau said we should focus on the ideal system we want, not what we currently have, and Kristin cautioned against relying on a state-based system that ignores local support and participation. Trevor Whipple stated that a regional structure led by law enforcement might be the best approach. Agreement among members that the recommendations should include training but be specialized for the

intended audience and that law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges should be included and consulted.

- Joanne Bourbeau turned the conversation to the issue of centralized data collection, provided an overview of the current private system (Animal Tracks).
- Trevor Whipple provided an over view of the two police databases in use in Vermont. Suggested that the Task Force contact Jeff Wallen, Director of the VCIC, for more information. The systems are uploaded once per month into the FBI database. Will soon include reporting on animal-related crimes. Specified that these are only crimes reported to law enforcement that go into the FBI database, and could not just include Animal Tracks info because it is not law enforcement action. Stated that law enforcement should at very least have access to Animal Tracks data to review during investigations (*note: law enforcement agencies do have access to Animal Tracks if they choose, but they use their own department's system instead*).
- Deb Loring began discussion about uniform response protocols and where response should be centralized. General agreement among members that it made the most sense within a state agency or a regional law enforcement model.
- Joanne Bourbeau asked what a task force model would look like in practice.
- Trevor Whipple said that it would involve a designated law enforcement officer in each region (however that may be designated) who would assemble all of the appropriate personnel (humane agents, veterinarians, DCF employees, etc.) that would coordinate the response to cruelty complaints.
- Joanne Bourbeau asked whether a cost-share model could be used.
- Trevor Whipple responded that the sexual crimes task force is based upon crime history over three years. Some towns have declined to participate leaving the task force underfunded, so cost-share on a voluntary basis could be difficult to assemble.
- Deb Loring stated that what is most need is oversight of the process and a systematic procedure for responding to potential crimes; an SOP with checklists.
- Kristin Haas asked is guidelines could be used to satisfy humane agents and ACOs need for clarity.
- Patti Lewis stated that towns need a clear chain of command for response.
- Kristin Haas said an SOP would help investigators understand what to look for in an investigation.
- Erika Holm asked if we needed to change state laws in order to institute an SOP.
- Joanne Bourbeau stated that it wasn't an either/or situation. Some laws need to be changed but others could be improved by clarifying the process.

- Deb Loring suggested you could have the law refer to certain guidance documents, which could then be modified in the future without the need to rewrite the law.
- Kristin Haas suggested a ongoing board could provide input on guidance documents.
- Joanne Bourbeau asked what the Task Force members thought about the idea of a standing board on animal welfare that could provide guidance (much like the state euthanasia board acts as a resource for the Agency of Agriculture). All members indicated an interest in the idea of an Animal Welfare Board as component of the reform.
- Paula Russell was asked how many regional law enforcement point people would be needed under a regional model. She indicated probably four would be needed to cover the state effectively.
- Deb Loring asked if there was a possibility that by putting law enforcement in charge we could be devolving to a system that didn't work before Animal Tracks was established.
- Joanne commented that she envisions a blended model where ACOs and humane agents work in coordination with law enforcement.
- Paula Russell said she would feel comfortable if they could contact a trained person within law enforcement and that person would be required to respond.
- Bill Brady said that it was important then to make sure these dedicated law enforcement point people were committed to the position.
- TJ Anderson said she thought there would be officers who would be interested in this type of assignment. Said you might be looking at the creation of entirely new positions dedicated to animal law enforcement. She pegged the total cost for a state officer at approximately \$100,000 a year.
- Paula Russell inquired if these positions could contract with towns to share the cost.
- Patti Lewis said that some towns might be reticent to cost-share voluntarily for services they may not use; would be hard to get agreement.
- Joanne Bourbeau proposed that the Task Force hold off on sentencing guideline changes until they hear from prosecutors.
- Barry Londeree provided a quick review of the Maine model for funding animal cruelty investigations through pet food and commercial feed registration fees and surcharges.
- Kristin described the Vermont registration process but did not know the exact registration fee and was unfamiliar with the exact process or total amount collected, but would check into it.
- Joanne wondered whether it was a good time to suggest dog license fee increases since the fee was just raised by \$1. She asked whether fines from civil tickets could be restructured to fund cruelty investigators and empower law enforcement officers to issue more civil tickets. Or could we recommend a system by where humane agents are given the authority to issue civil tickets?

- Deb Loring brought up the ideas of license plates for animal welfare, a checkoff program on tax forms, and licensing fees for horses.
- Cindy Cross-Greenia stated that the horse organizations would likely be opposed to licensing fees for horses.
- Erika Holm noted that the funding options discussed so far have only been related to the cost of funding an animal cruelty response system, but there is also a need to help fund the cost of care for animals that are relinquished or seized by shelters and rescues.
- Joanne Bourbeau mentioned the possibility that the statewide Animal Welfare Board discussed earlier could collect donations and coordinate the distribution of grants to compensate for the cost of care for animals and expenses related to the seizure of animals.
- Joanne led a discussion to determine the date of the next meeting, which will be **Thursday, November 5th from 12-3 pm at the Waterbury Emergency Operations Center.**
- Meeting was adjourned at 12:02 p.m.