



King County

King County Animal Care and Control Citizens' Advisory Committee

September 24, 2007

Dear County Executive Sims:

We are pleased to transmit the attached recommendations on behalf of the King County Animal Care and Control Citizens' Advisory Committee.

On May 29, the King County Council approved Motion 12521, charging this advisory committee with the weighty task of working with the executive branch to make recommendations on how to transform King County Animal Care and Control (KCACC) into a model program for the humane treatment of animals, and to reduce euthanasia rates in KCACC shelters.

This committee has taken its task extremely seriously, ever mindful of the thousands of King County animals who are depending on the work that we do.

Although we were not first convened until July 19, 2007, the full advisory committee has met 10 times in the last two months, in addition to dozens of subcommittee meetings. The members of the committee have applied their varied expertise and the common sense and values of King County citizens, and worked long hours to finish our report by today's date – the deadline we set in our August 7, 2007, letter to you. Members of the committee have toured the KCACC facilities, spoken to many dedicated and compassionate volunteers and staff members, interviewed representatives of the model jurisdictions listed in Motion 12521, issued numerous surveys to local stakeholders, and studied thousands of pages of documents.

In order to sufficiently focus on all the facets of a model animal care program, we formed subcommittees focusing on five key areas: Shelter Operations, Community Outreach, Animal Cruelty, Spay/Neuter, and Feral/Free-Roaming Cats. The attached 120-page report represents the combined 47 recommendations of the five subcommittees. It is worth noting that although this committee is constituted of people from diverse backgrounds and with varied philosophical approaches to animal welfare, we are transmitting this report with but one dissenting vote on a single recommendation.

One point on which we are unanimous is the deplorable state of KCACC's shelters. Far from being a "model animal control program"¹ or a "recognized leader in the . . . animal welfare field,"² we found King County's animal care program to be well beneath the standards that should be expected in a prosperous, compassionate, and generous community such as King County.

The animals in KCACC's shelters suffer from high rates of disease, improper housing, inadequate exercise and social contact, a lack of basic comforts, and high levels of stress. The outreach programs designed to move these animals out of the shelter are paltry at best, and KCACC has a very low profile within the community. King County does not offer programs that could help stem the flow of animals into the shelter, such as pet retention services and spay/neuter programs for the public and for feral (free-roaming) cats. KCACC lacks the resources to respond to cruelty and neglect calls in a timely and effective manner.

Although our recommendations are numerous and varied – and each deserves individual attention – several common themes emerge. First, the King County shelters must be immediately renovated in order to provide a basic level of humane care for the animals housed there. The Crossroads shelter is unsuitable for the sheltering of animals, while the Kent shelter has been badly neglected for many years, and is plainly inadequate to provide for the animals' most basic needs. Second, a shelter consultant must be promptly hired to provide further, detailed advice on how to improve KCACC standards of care and to revitalize KCACC's policies and programs, as we urged in our letter to you dated August 27, 2007. Third, the KCACC staffing structure, job descriptions, and staffing levels must be thoroughly reviewed, and some basic staff positions must be added, in order to support adequate veterinary and animal care and viable outreach programs, as well as prompt response time to animal control, cruelty and neglect calls. Finally, there must be an overhaul of KCACC programs and policies, to bring them in line with a model program for the humane treatment of animals.

In short, it is imperative that immediate action be taken, not just to create a model animal care program, but to provide the most basic levels of humane care for the animals who depend on us. If King County wishes to lower its euthanasia rates and meet the goals set by King County Council, it must take the steps outlined in our report without delay – to provide proper care for the animals entrusted to the county's guardianship; develop effective outreach programs to move animals out of the shelter and into homes; and implement preemptive programs such as free- and low-cost spay/neuter, pet retention services, and feral cat education, in order to reduce the number of animals entering the shelter in the first place.

We applaud Councilmember Julia Patterson and her colleagues on the King County Council for embarking on this noble project, and bringing the community's attention to the disturbing conditions in the KCACC shelters. Now, we hope that all the members of

¹ Goal set by Motion 12521, passed by King County Council on May 29, 2007.

² Claim made in letter from King County Executive Ron Sims to the Honorable Larry Gossett, transmitting the staffing plan for the KCACC Citizens' Advisory Committee, June 21, 2007.

the political process can come together to solve the problems we have identified, and provide the leadership and determination necessary to meet the goals set by the May 29, 2007, legislation. We urge you to work in collaboration with the King County Council to immediately correct the substandard conditions we found in King County's shelters, and to develop a model animal care program of which we all can be proud.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie White". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and legible.

Julie White, Chair

Derek Yoshinaka, Vice-Chair

cc: Al Dams – King County Animal Services Acting Manager
Anne Brusklund – Interim Deputy Director, REALS
Sherril Huff – Director, REALS
Kurt Meacham – King County Animal Services Staff