

**MINUTES OF A PUBLIC HEARING  
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
HELD ON  
MAY 04, 2015**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners held a Public Hearing on May 04, 2015, at 6:00 p.m., Community Services Building, 538 Scotts Creek Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present: Brian McMahan, Chairman  
Mark Jones, Vice Chair  
Charles Elders, Commissioner  
Vicki Greene, Commissioner  
Boyce Deitz, Commissioner

Chuck Wooten, County Manager  
Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Chairman McMahan called the public hearing to order and stated the purpose was to receive public input for consideration of a proposed new animal shelter and/or adoption center.

**ANIMAL CONTROL / ANIMAL SHELTER OVERVIEW:** Paula Carden, Health Director reported:

(a) What the county has in terms of the animal shelter:

- Four employees, three Animal Control Officers and one Shelter Attendant
- 15 dog runs
- 15 cat cages
- Three trucks with NCDA approved animal transport boxes
- Storage building for supplies
- Freezer
- Two air conditioners
- Furnace

(b) Last year, they began using new software, PetPoint for entering and tracking animal control information. Each vehicle has been outfitted with laptops and docking stations. Each employee has a smartphone with a hotspot so they have internet access in most places.

(c) The animal shelter has several very dedicated volunteers. Three volunteers are there 5-6 days each week. The animal shelter also uses community service workers.

(d) Specifics of the current facility:

- Over 30 years old
- Multiple repairs have been made that were required by the NCDA Division, which oversees animal shelters in the state
- Not handicapped accessible
- Septic was installed in 1995
- 2,200 heated square feet

(e) Animal Control is charged with enforcement of:

- NC General Statutes in regards to rabies
- Animal cruelty laws
- Sponsoring rabies clinics throughout the county

(f) The animal shelter is in charge of:

- Providing space for animals quarantined after a bite occurs
- Providing food, water and shelter for animals that have been captured or turned over
- Adopting cats and dogs to individuals

- Works with the humane organizations to transfer adoptable animals
  - Providing rabies vaccinations to animals to be adopted
  - Most of the adoption fees go towards subsidizing spaying/neutering the adopted animal
  - Performs euthanasia on an “as needed” basis
- (g) Short-term needs of the animal shelter that are currently being addressed:
- The office area needs to be enlarged
  - Floors have been painted in the cat room, quarantine room and euthanasia area
  - A fan has been mounted on the wall in the euthanasia room for better ventilation
  - Metal shelving has been installed in the euthanasia and cat rooms
  - Louvered doors have been installed on the storage area
  - A spray wand has been put in the tub in the euthanasia room
  - All plumbing has been checked for property insulation to prevent freezing
  - Last year, floors were sealed in the kennels and the gates on the kennels were reinforced. The previous year, a perimeter fence was installed.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

(a) Sally Johannessen of Cashiers stated she wanted to speak to the emotional lives of their companion animals. Studies into the minds of dogs and cats now being conducted at Yale and Emory Universities. Both have Canine Cognitive Centers as part of their Departments of Psychology. Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine has a similar department researching the minds of cats. MRI’s are now being done on fully awake and alert dogs. These scans show that the parts of their brains that respond to emotional stimuli are exactly the same as humans. One of the dogs involved in this groundbreaking research is a dog named Callie, which proves that what they intuitively knew about the minds of their companions is now scientific fact. Dogs and cats are people too. This is not Voodoo science. These three universities are respected throughout the world and would not be doing research in this field unless they felt it was scientifically very important. These findings now put a greater responsibility on them to do the right thing with the animals in their care. They also know that a dog’s sense of smell is 1,000 times more sensitive than a human’s. Logic tells them that dogs in the shelter are highly sensitive to their environment. Because the current shelter is so small, it is a pool of terrifying sights, sounds and smells. A dog that has suffered neglect or abuse, a dog that has been fending for itself or a well-loved family pet that finds itself in the shelter is already stressed and does not find a safe haven there. There is no place to spend quiet time with a dog or cat off leash unless of course you go to the euthanasia room, which no doubt smells of death to sensitive noses. This is a terrible place to assess animals for potential adoption. There is a very small outside yard, but no dogs are allowed off lead that there is not much room to play and nowhere to go if it is raining. Obviously, with only 15 small kennels, good dogs are euthanized simply for lack of space. The Animal Control Officers need more office space to carry out the important work they do. The building may have been adequate 25 years ago, but sadly it is no longer viable. Let them go forward with a plan to remedy this embarrassment in the county. They cannot wait any longer to do the right thing for the dogs and cats in their care. Over her adult life she has adopted 16 dogs and 11 cats from shelters, with the Jackson County Animal Shelter being the worst shelter she has visited. She places the blame on the building, which has done its best but now needs to be retired and replaced with a 21<sup>st</sup> century facility.

(b) Mary Adams of Sylva stated she is the Vice President of ARF. ARF is in favor of keeping animal control at its current location, but have a separate adoption center. If it is a shared adoption facility, other counties must first have their own animal control in place. For more than 20 years, the county has worked diligently, along with its partners, to reduce the animal over-population problem. Today, the shelter is virtually “no kill” for dogs and low kill for cats. When she started volunteering with ARF 20 years ago, most dogs were euthanized as soon as their screen period was over. Now, despite the fact the county’s population has grown, virtually no dog has been euthanized since December. Swain has no separate animal control facility and the proposed adoption center would be filled with their animals.

They would feel like they would be starting over from the beginning. If Jackson does go with the separate adoption facility, it is hoped that the county's long-term partners in animal welfare would have input as to its location, design and administration. The adoption center ARF hopes for would have features common to new shelters, including places for classes and activities. A successful plan would include animal control, an adoption center and a serious commitment to spay and neuter for all animals. The county should consider ways to discourage the sale of unaltered dogs and cats at pet stores and work with the local colleges to find ways to reduce student ownership of animals.

(c) Harold Sims of Cullowhee stated that when he arrived in Glenville in 1992, he learned that the people Cashiers were trying to raise money to build an animal shelter. Having had a little experience with animal sheltering and a degree in biology, he was quick to offer his assistance. But due to unsolvable differences, such as their shelter at the time not willing to be a no-kill facility, they parted ways and he opened a small cat shelter in a converted tool shed on his property, which became Catman2 Inc. Not satisfied with his small operation, he learned more about animal sheltering by traveling throughout the state to other facilities and meetings. He then decided to expand his operation by building a new facility in Cullowhee, which was the first no-kill shelter in the county. He feels he has gained a wealth of knowledge in the field of animal sheltering and could help form a plan that could make Jackson County a model for animal sheltering. His suggestions:

- Improve the existing facility and use it as a holding facility for animals in need of isolation or until the animals were deemed safe for transfer to an adoption center. Others may have to be euthanized when the decision is made they would not make suitable pets. There will never be a totally no-kill animal shelter.
- He feels that dogs and cats should not be sheltered in close proximity. He feels they should look for a new site for a dog shelter. Dogs would be surrendered there by owners or brought by animal control and based on demeanor, adoptable dogs would be treated, fixed and placed for adoption. Injured, sick or vicious dogs would be taken to the airport facility for further observation.
- As founder and owner of Catman2 Inc., he would be willing to work with the county to allow expansion at his facility to handle more cats. Cats would have to be spayed or neutered before adoption, not kept in cages, but allowed to roam free. He has shown this to be a humane and viable way to shelter cats.
- In addition to a new shelter, the county needs an adoption center located where the public could come to meet animals awaiting adoption.
- The Cashiers-Highlands Humane Society seems to be an entity to themselves. He suggested leaving them out of the equation.
- They must expand low or no cost spay and neuter programs in the northern end of the county.

(d) Kaleb Lynch of Cullowhee stated he is the Shelter Manager at Catman2, spay and neuter coordinator for ARF and volunteers at the animal shelter. The rescuers in this part of the county, ARF and Catman2 have worked really hard. The animal shelter staff is amazing. If they have an injured animal that they think can be helped, they call them and they immediately get the animal without question. He does not agree with partnering with Swain or any other county. The county has worked really hard and does not want to start over. He also agrees with a separate facility for animal control and adoption. They could renovate the current facility and locate an adoption center next to it similar to Asheville. He hopes there can be a compromise for the betterment of the animals.

(e) Allison Padgett of Sylva stated she thinks the current location of the shelter is easy to get to. It does needs some help like a bigger office, more space and an adoption center. As of today, at the shelter, they have 10 of 15 dog kennels open.

**(f)** Barbara Bell of Sylva stated that in February she was on her way to the shelter to talk about expansion. It was also a sad day because her pet sitter had taken her eyes off her dog briefly, and she was gone. The next day someone called the shelter and said a dog had been hit on the road and had run up into the woods. The people at the shelter went and looked for the dog, but could not find her. She went two weeks with no sign of her dog. One day, someone who works for the county was walking on the greenway and saw a dog in the leaves, but could not get her to respond. They called the shelter and they came down and called her to say they thought they had her dog. They fed her and checked her chip and it was indeed her dog. She was very grateful. They do wonderful things at the shelter and are kind to the animals. She prefers they do not share with the other counties.

**(g)** Bettie Ashby of Sylva stated that she thought everyone there wanted a new shelter. She proposed a shared shelter with Swain County for one reason, because they are already getting their animals. Swain does not have animal control. When someone finds a stray in Swain County, they bring them to Jackson County.

**(h)** Jean Lewis of Cullowhee stated she understood that the shelter had to be concerned about rabies control and they have to be concerned about dangerous animals. But she thinks there needs to be another major concern in terms of reducing the number of euthanizations for space purposes. If they could have a larger shelter it would reduce the number of euthanizations due to space considerations. She believes there is a three-prong approach that would be important to make it work. There has to be space, adoptions and spay/neutering. In 2014, ARF had 322 adoptions and 756 spay/neuters, along with Catman2 Inc. She is not in favor of sharing with Swain.

**(i)** Josh James of Cullowhee stated he used to work for Jackson County as an Animal Control Officer. Orange, Wake and Chatham Counties all have in-house Veterinarians at their shelter facilities. Wake County built their facility ten years ago and within three years, they were already out of space. He is still proud of what the people at the shelter are doing. The shelter is small and they need more room. He is for a new adoption facility, using the current shelter for animal control. Just plan for 30 years when you are planning. He thinks partnering with Swain County is a bad idea.

**(j)** Grace Phillips of Macon County stated she does a lot of fostering for ARF in Macon County. She thinks there are already counties working together. It seems like the problem is spacing. Many ARF volunteers work hard to foster in order to get spacing. You have a whole network of individuals working in conjunction. If there is a problem with Swain, ask them for money and assistance. It needs to be a shelter for the future.

**(k)** Pam Sterka stated everyone here wants to do something good for the animals, but the Commissioners are the ones tasked with making a decision. She asked that they listen to everyone that has used their time and resources to solving this problem in the county without any government assistance. She feels it would be better to do this without Swain.

**(l)** Pat Thomas stated she has been involved in animal rescuing for about 20 years. She thinks if they are going to stop pet over-population, they have to spay/neuter before the animals leave the shelter for adoption, so that the burden is not put on the adopter. Many people spend their personal money on animals to take care of them because they don't want to take them to the shelter. If there is going to be a task force, she is interested in being on it.

**(m)** Melissa Jackson stated she thinks they need to start thinking about enforcing leash laws, mandatory spay/neuter laws in the county. She would like to see the animals get fixed before they leave the shelter. She worked at the shelter and it is hit or miss if the adopter follows up with spay/neutering.

**(n)** Annie Harlow stated a lot of out-of-state shelters have dog runs and places the animals can socialize and be free. One thing governments do in other locations that is not done here, is enforce a law for people to pay for a license for cats and dogs. They must have a certificate stating their pet has been spayed or neutered before they can receive a license. Also, she does not want to penalize animals in other counties because the people cannot work together. Let's try to work together.

(o) David Stroud of Cashiers stated he is the Executive Director of the Cashiers-Highlands Humane Society, a Member of the National Society for Animal Welfare and he is currently serving as the elected Chairman of the State North Carolina Animal Federation. He has spent his entire career in animal welfare and building coalitions. They have now saved over 100 animals from the county shelter. They have also done two things above and beyond that he believes has helped the Jackson County Shelter immensely, their intake of owner surrendered and stray animals has tripled in the last three years. He agrees with everyone about the emphasis on spay and neuter. They offered over 400 low-cost spay/neuters last year and they are gearing up for a new campaign called 20 for 20, whereby they are giving 20 appointments for \$20 to fix peoples pets Spay/neuter is going to be the ultimate solution for pet over-population. He believes there is a need to educate people to fix their pets. They have programs for local school children in classrooms about the importance of spay/neuter and the children get it. He salutes county for starting task force on issue because there is more than one solution. He asked that everyone work together for the common goal. The more animal welfare organizations that work together, the more lives they save and the more forever homes they find.

**COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:**

(a) Commissioner Greene stated she has only been a Commissioner for two years, but she was raised in Jackson County and the current Board of Commissioners is the first one she has seen in her lifetime willing to tackle the needs of the animal shelter. She has facilitated two meetings for ARF and they are a passionate group and has helped wake the rest of the county up about what the needs are for the animals, and she thanked them.

(b) Commissioner Jones thanked and commended the people for their passion and for coming out and sharing their information and facts. Several months ago, they had a meeting with Ms. Carden and he walked away with a whole new concept of animal control. He commended Chairman McMahan and Commissioner Deitz for visiting the animal shelter. He stated he would support the recommendations of the task force.

(c) Commissioner Elders thanked everyone for coming out and sharing their comments with Commissioners. He assured them they would listen to all comments for and against combining with Swain County, they will take it all into consideration. He said he, personally could not remember a time when he did not have a dog himself and he does love the animals.

(d) Commissioner Deitz stated he appreciated everyone's passion. He is learning a lot about what happens in the county. He did visit the animal shelter. He thinks how people treat animals tells a lot about how they are as a society. He has a lot of neighbors and knows people that do a lot for animals every day, that are not involved in any kind of organization and he thanked those people too. He pledged to work as hard as he can to make this as good as it can be.

(e) Chairman McMahan stated that throughout his life, he has had eight dogs and three cats and all have been stray or come from the shelter, with the exception of one. He stated that the Commissioners are committed to seeing this through. He thanked Ms. Carden for organizing the meeting and getting it started. Their goal is to move forward to enhance the level of service in the county. He thanked the volunteers and staff that work with the animals. The county has set funds aside to start the planning process with the goal putting it all together next year. He encouraged everyone to work together and focus on what is best for the animals in the community.

There being no further public comments, Commissioner Deitz moved that the public hearing be adjourned. Commissioner Greene seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

Attest:

Approved:

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Angela M. Winchester, Clerk

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Brian Thomas McMahan, Chairman