

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MARQUETTE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
PUBLIC HEARING ON ANIMAL CONTROL
Tuesday, November 5, 1991

Vice-Chairperson Seppanen called the meeting to order. Roll call was taken and the following roll recorded: Present: Comm. Angeli, Comm. Arsenault, Comm. Balbierz, and Comm. Seppanen. Excused: Comm. Corkin.

Comm. Seppanen - This is a public hearing in regards to the draft that the Ad Hoc Animal Control Committee has put forth. We're here basically to review that draft and collect public comment. I would like everybody to know that Gerald Corkin will be here hopefully a little later, he had an auto accident on the way here. So I'm going to Chair the meeting. At this point I would like to turn it over to Comm. Arsenault, who is Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Animal Control Committee, and let him start the review of the report.

Comm. Arsenault - I'd like to give you a brief overview of what the Committee has looked at, and what we have come up with to this point. Also, after I'm through I know there are other Committee members present, so if they have anything to add, or if I forget anything, I'd appreciate if you would add it to the brief comments that I have. The Committee was formed a little over a year ago, and its purpose was to look at a possible County-wide Animal Control program. We immediately surveyed the units of government in Marquette County, to see basically what they were looking for. The two most basic questions that the Committee looked at were, "Are you in favor of Marquette County having a total animal control system, a County-wide system? And how should it be funded?"

The survey wasn't overwhelming, in fact, not all of our units of government agreed that the County should have a County-wide system. Only a little over 50% agreed there should be a County-wide system. There are several units that have their own program already, and are spending their own monies. So the survey told us that it wasn't unanimous that local units were looking for a County-wide program.

We looked at several options for funding. The Committee, more or less, ruled out a millage option which was proposed by the Township Association. What we did eventually come up with is to try and develop a program that would be self-funded through a fee structure of the licenses and through the penalties and fines that may come about. This gives a little introduction to what we looked at and provides a budget for a County-wide program.

Some of the things we ran into in looking at the County-wide program are: How do we get everybody to participate? Some units are already doing their own program, some are not. Also, with the geographical area of the County being so big, how do we cover Michigamme, Champion, Republic, from maybe a Marquette based operation? Another concern, if you remember during our landfill process, we had a lot of problems getting everyone to cooperate, how do we get all units of government to cooperate?

So basically what we've come up with at this point is a budget, or at least a proposed budget, for a County-wide program. In my opinion, and I think most of the Committee's opinion, it looks cost prohibitive. Quite expensive! The budget is quite high. One of the proposed fee structures that we looked at that would support this, had license fees in the neighborhood of \$17.00 to \$19.00. A lot of units of governments right now are getting \$3.00 to \$5.00 for a license, so obviously we don't think that would be acceptable.

So what we're looking for tonight is some input from the public on how we may pursue animal control further. If anyone has any ideas on how you think we could fund this, or if we should fund this, or if we should have the program. I would like to ask the Clerk that he would keep the comments verbatim, word for word,

so I can use the minutes of this hearing at the next Animal Control meeting to evaluate the comments. We hope to come back to the County Board with a recommendation. At this point, unless Commissioners have a comment, I'd like to invite anyone from the Animal Control Committee that could add anything to speak.

Vice-Chairperson Seppanen - When you do speak would you please give your name and address. Are there any people from the Committee wishing to speak?

Frank Sciotto - Ad Hoc Committee for Animal Control, 1135 W. Crescent, Marquette, MI. - I think that Mr. Arsenault, who is the Chairman, covered it rather adequately, and before we get too far into it as to whether or not it is a possibility, or if there is going to be funding for it, I am eager to hear from all of the other people before I would make any further comments. People from the entire area that this would effect. We realize, of course, that the City of Marquette does have its own type of animal control system that is funded through the taxpayers dollars of the City of Marquette. If we intend to go any further with this, then the City of Marquette would be very interested in finding out as to how they fit into the picture with regard to funding. So at that point I would like to hear from people from other townships and cities that have more of a problem than Marquette City. Thank you.

Comm. Seppanen - O.K. I think we will open the floor for people to make their comments in regards to the proposal.

Christine Westley - 485 Hustler, K.I.Sawyer AFB. - I've come here this evening basically to express my support for a consistent animal control policy, and I feel that it is a necessity. I've brought with me a statement from a co-worker who is was uable to attend. Her name is Jean Searinen-McCartney, 15630 North Westwood Circle, Ishpeming Township.

Her statement reads as follows: I am unable to attend this public hearing, but do have some concerns about the need for a reasonable, humane, consistent, and coordinated animal control program. As a taxpayer in Ishpeming Township, I wrote a letter to the Township about the backward method of shooting and disposing of unclaimed stray animals. I've also spoke to the Township Supervisor because I did care about the need for proper handling of that aspect of animal control. I'm a taxpayer and I would prefer that my money go towards an intelligent, thoughtful, animal control plan, than towards a caveman type of arrangement. The bottom line is that it costs money to run municipalities and to provide adequate and appropriate services, including an animal control program. I believe there is a need for a consistent, reasonable, and humane animal control program in Marquette County. Thank you.

Leanne Scarffe - 128 Sunset Drive, Negaunee, Michigan. I guess I would like to address public confidence in any animal control program that the County sees fit to develop. We need one! I think the income, at least part of it, would come from enforcement that many townships and municipalities don't do right now. Licensing is pretty much voluntary. If your animal is caught strayed, some municipalities will fine you and check to see if you have a license. But if you don't, or if your dog or cat isn't caught strayed, there is no fine, and no one is going to come and say, well you are going to have to license your dog or your cat. I think that would help in part for the income.

The program itself needs public confidence, in the treatment, the handling, the housing, and the disposal or disposition of any animal that is in their care. Stray animals sometimes need a lot

of care. It's not just a matter if they come in with flees, other health problems, or hit by a car. Programs have to be developed and the private person should be responsible when they claim their animal.

The fees I think should gradually increase, but enforcement would bring in a lot of money that isn't there right now. Enforcement should be consistent, it shouldn't be ..., well ..., he really didn't mean to let his dog run loose ..., she didn't mean to let the cat run loose ..., but the public has to be aware of what the ordinance is. It has to be an ordinance that people can live with, and it has to be enforced. I think the County should, through its committee, do a comprehensive ordinance that everyone could enforce. Thank you.

Deb Eckstrom - Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, 113 Engman Lake Access Road, Skandia. I'm also a veterinarian at K.I.Sawyer AFB. I've been asked to bring written comments from the military public health officials at K.I.Sawyer because they are unable to attend this evening. Their names are Cap. Mary Brown, she is also a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, and Cap. Dennis Fay, who has a masters in public health. The three of us agree strongly that we need a County-wide animal control program both for humane reasons and for public health reasons. We worry a lot about rabies, we don't have a lot of documented cases in this area because there is an extremely small number of specimens submitted. We do know there is a fair amount of rabies on the Wisconsin border and on the Canadian border, and we assume its here and we are not seeing it because its not being reported. We run into problems occasionally on base when we deal with animal bite cases that are presented at the base hospital. When the animals are in the vicinity of Marquette City, or on base, or in some of the townships that have animal control programs, it's relatively easy for us to follow up, and for the physicians to decide whether the people who were bit need to get the rabies shots. When we need to deal with some of the townships and cities that do not have comprehensive programs it becomes very difficult for the physicians to know how to treat their patients. So from the public health folks at K.I. Sawyer, we strongly recommend a County-wide program.

John Olson - Supervisor, Michigamme Township. I guess I have to comment on it. I haven't had too much time to study this, I just received it tonight. But I believe that the County should continue to look into a County-wide animal control. I come from a small unit of government, which cannot afford animal control. Of nineteen townships, probably ten of us can't afford it. I am personally a believer that the money should be generated from the individuals that have the animals, although at \$17.00 to \$19.00 per animal, no one would buy a dog license. Who's going to pay \$20.00 for a dog license? We have to be realistic about this.

But I do say yes, continue doing your study, let's get something more concrete. I'll bring this information to my board. The first question from my board will be "How Much?" So I guess it comes down to the old almighty dollar. I think you should continue.

Rosemary Glenn - City of Marquette. I'm wondering how this plan will take care of the skunk I trapped in my backyard. Right now I am just someone who cares about that skunk and I'm going to release it after it has been hydrated, cared for, and I don't have any worry about it. Will this plan help me with that? Currently the City of Marquette spends \$42,000.00 on animal control. And we feel its responsive, and its right there on the streets and it helps us. I certainly think we would be willing to go into a County arrangement, if we got the same kind of response and care for that amount of money or less. That would be my concern. How does it help us to do any better what we are doing now.

Arlene Hill - I'm President of the Marquette County Townships Association, and I think we first brought this issue to you. I am also the Clerk of Chocolay Township, one of the larger townships, and I think in Chocolay Township we can handle our dog control problems pretty well, but we put money into it. And it might well be converted into a program like this that would help us with the cost. I think originally when the Townships Association brought this before you, we talked about millage, but its not because we want our taxes raised. It's just that we know programs like this take money, and it's got to come from somewhere.

I see that the funds that Chocolay and some of the cities and larger townships, put into animal control could be diverted to this area. I'm concerned not only with the larger townships, but also with the smaller townships that cannot afford to take care of the problem. I think the County has to push ahead for a program that is good for all of us.

I too have just looked at your handout for the first time tonight. I am a little bit overwhelmed at the overhead: the control officer and four officers besides, a secretary, and a clerk, that's a lot of overhead. I guess I wonder if all of that is necessary to take care of the problem. Maybe that's where you could cut, to bring our budget into line. I appreciate your working on this though, its an area of real need.

Dennis Aloia - I wanted to add a few comments to some of the things that have been said. One of the problems I think the committee struggled with, and members can maybe address this if I miss-state it, is really how we can go about and do this with participation. What I'm getting at is that several of you have indicated that your city or your township might be willing to contribute because you already contribute. Others have indicated they can't contribute because they have no money. So one of the things the committee struggled with was, do we do a partial program that covers part of the County for those who are willing to participate, or do we do a full blown program?

I think the consensus finally was, we can't do it for a part because if we have an officer that can cover, let's say, six townships, and then a seventh township that's adjacent decides they want to participate, yet we don't have enough time or man hours to cover, and they can't come up with their share of the money, how do you tell them no? So we looked at the idea of a County-wide system. Now, the problem with a County-wide system that is funded from cities and townships, along with the County, is that if one says no, we still have a problem in that unit, and our costs are the same.

In terms of the program that we set up. One of the problems is that if we are doing County-wide animal control and we have two calls, and one is in Powell Township and one is in Republic Township, we have to cover those. We have tried to look at this from a pretty asture approach in terms of how many people would we need to be able to give coverage County-wide. We even looked at using the County Sheriff as a back up, but right now our Sheriff does about 450 pick-ups a year, and this is just sort of informally. There are lots of other people out there doing them too, so while it may seem that this is a lot of people, I really don't think to provide coverage we could do much less than this. If people are paying, and there is a problem in their township or their city, someone has to get there to cover it. I don't think we could do it with a couple people, and the Sheriff agrees. If we look back to a study done ten years ago, this proposed budget is quite similar.

Comm. Arsenault - I have one point I'd like to make. When we talked about the licensing, obviously we were looking at one of these animal control officers, almost exclusively, or at least the clerk doing an animal census, requiring all their time so we know what kind of animals are around. Then we could enforce licensing.

That is, we would know that at such-and-such an address there is an animal there, and we would go there and collect for a license. So this wouldn't be on a voluntary basis. The census would be followed through so that we know and could enforce licensing as well as any penalties and fines that were worked into the fee schedule.

Chippewa County, which has a County-wide system in place, came and gave us a presentation. Basically, they said that the census person is almost more important than the person who actually goes out and picks up the strays and deals with the animals. The census person is the one that actually generates your income. They said this is extremely important and because of the geography of Marquette County, we would need to have 24 hour coverage. Like Administrator Aloia was saying, if we had two calls, one on each end of the County, we would have to cover them both. As Rosemary Glenn stated, anyone willing to put money into this program, would want as good or better service than they are getting now. So to provide that type of service to the City of Marquette, and to the other cities and townships, we would have to have the people, and that obviously raised the budget quite high. I don't think we would want to do a program that would just disappoint people. If we put a program into effect with half of this budget, and there were several units not getting service, it wouldn't work out at all.

These are the concerns that I asked for this hearing. I am looking for suggestions or routes that we might be able to take, that the committee might be able to look at. I would also add that I know some of you have just looked at the information this evening. If you have any written comments, or think of something in a couple of days, just drop it in the mail to me in care of the County building. We will take those comments into consideration at our next committee meeting. I would appreciate any kind of suggestions because we are kind of at a dead end. I can't see how with the State budget crunch, and the township and the County crunches, where this money is going to come from.

Comm. Seppanen - Are there any more comments from the public? Any comments from fellow Commissioners. I had a conversation with former Chairperson of the County Board, Tim Lowe, who also was past president of the Humane Society. We went over the whole issue and a couple of points that Tim brought out were: One, from his past study on the issue that the revenues that would be generated by the assessment of fines for people who were letting their animals run loose without licenses and so on, would be split in a way similar to traffic fines through the court, and not all that money would be available for animal control. I don't know if that's true or not, but Tim believed that to be the case. Second, that if the license fee is too high, there are going to be a lot of people not licensing their animals, which would be a major problem.

Comm. Arsenault - As to the revenue question, my understanding by talking with Chippewa County, and maybe Dennis will correct me if I'm wrong, is that we could pass an ordinance and set the program up so the fees generated go back strictly into the program. Is that right Dennis?

Dennis Aloia - I'm not sure Commissioner, we would have to check that. Perhaps Dr. Johnson would know.

Randall Johnson M.D. Director, County Health Dept. - I remember also that any fines that were generated through the specific ordinance could go back into supportive programs. So there is a mechanism to do that.

Comm. Seppanen - Are there any other comments? Hearing none I will close this hearing. There is a period of two weeks for anyone to come up with some written comments, the deadline is November 20th. Address them to Comm. Arsenault, in care of the County Courthouse.

Comm. Angeli - What's the next step?

Comm. Arsenault - The next step will be to consider the comments that were given tonight, and all written comments that come in, to the next Animal Control Committee meeting. We will come up with some type of recommendation and come back to the Board. Then the County Board will decide what the direction from that point. The only thing that the Committee will do is come up with a recommendation, with maybe an option or two. It will be up to the County Board from there.

Comm. Angeli - Are you going to be looking at cost effectiveness of this? Because in the proposal it says, "Assumes that the services will be discontinued in the other communities." Can you find that out positively?

Comm. Arsenault - That's one of the big problems. The City of Marquette, being the number one on the top of our list, must be assured that they're going to get the same or better service, or else how will we know that they'd want to be involved in the program. We sure are not going to double dip. If they already are paying for animal control, they sure are not going to pay on top of their existing program.

Comm. Angeli - I am concerned. Part of this would be that we're making government bigger. This kind of bothers me a little bit. We haven't heard from all of the governing agencies and whether they do want this kind of a program. We must also keep in mind the financial problems that we as a County have right now. I think we are all aware of that, that's no secret. Maybe its bad timing right now, I don't know, but I'm not being too receptive to it. There are just too many things out there that bother me.

Comm. Seppanen - Any other Commissioner comments?

Comm. Balbierz - I suggest that the committee develop, as best they can, a projection of revenues to fund this program. We have in our package here tonight, a proposed budget from a cost standpoint, and we've already heard from at least one of the municipalities that it's important to know what their cost would be. What the bottom line is. So I think we are going to have to come up with some kind of revenue projections as to how we would fund the program.

Comm. Seppanen - I would like to thank everybody for braving the weather to make it here, and this meeting is adjourned.

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