

**Town of Bluefield
Town Council
Public Hearing
October 22, 2019**

The Bluefield, Virginia Town Council held a Public Hearing on Tuesday, October 22, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. to receive input on the proposed ordinance entitled: “An Ordinance to create Article IV (Public Nuisances) of Chapter 6 (Animals) of the Code of Ordinances, Town of Bluefield, Virginia.

TOWN COUNCIL PRESENT

Don Harris, Mayor
Anglis Trigg, Jr., Vice-Mayor
Chuck Presley, Councilmember
Jimmy Jones, Councilmember
Ron Holt, Councilmember

ALSO PRESENT

Mike Watson, Town Manager
Matt Freedman, Town Attorney
Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk
Rachel Looney, Administrative Asst.
Billie Roberts, Comm. Dev. Coordinator
18 members of public

ABSENT

Jarrold Bailey, Councilmember

Mayor Harris opened the Public Hearing at 7:00 p.m.

Mrs. Hernandez read the following Legal Notice that appeared in the Bluefield Daily Telegraph on Tuesday, October 8, 2019 and Tuesday, October 15, 2019.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Council of the Town of Bluefield, Virginia will hold a PUBLIC HEARING on **October 22, 2019, at 7:00 p.m.** in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall of the Town of Bluefield at 112 Huffard Drive in Bluefield, Virginia. This said PUBLIC HEARING is being held to receive input on a proposed ordinance entitled “AN ORDINANCE TO CREATE ARTICLE IV (PUBLIC NUISANCES) OF CHAPTER 6 (ANIMALS) OF THE CODE OF ORDINANCES, TOWN OF BLUEFIELD, VIRGINIA”. In summary, such ordinance, if adopted, would declare any companion animal that creates unsafe or unsanitary conditions within the corporate limits of the Town of Bluefield to be a public nuisance. Additionally, the proposed ordinance, if adopted, would make it a Class 4 misdemeanor or civil penalty for any person to create or encourage such a public nuisance. Furthermore, such ordinance defines a “companion animal” and “unsafe or unsanitary conditions”. A copy of the full text of the said ordinance proposed may be viewed prior to the said PUBLIC HEARING at the office of the Town Clerk of the Town of Bluefield, Virginia at the Town Hall of the Town of Bluefield at 112 Huffard Drive in Bluefield, Virginia, Monday through Friday, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. All interested persons are invited to appear at the said PUBLIC HEARING and present their views. Questions/comments may be referred to Kim Hernandez, the Town Clerk of the Town of Bluefield, Virginia at (276) 322-4626 or hernandez@bluefieldva.org.

Margie Boothe stated she lived on the county side of the line but her address is 103 Hill Top Lane. The reason I am here tonight is there is a lot of false information that has been put out on social media. We understand there is a feral/stray cat issue going on. But it's not going to be an easy fix and we all know that and nobody wants animals hurt or killed, but we need to find a way as a community, whether it's the town and the county joining forces to help offset the spay and neuter process because it's very expensive to do that on your own. But if you take organizations like the 2nd Chance for Cats, they are a non-profit organization, they deal with strictly donations. 3,300 cats have been spayed or neutered and that is a huge deal, especially for the kittens that are born feral. I want to make this clear because it seems to have gotten put up on social media that we were having this meeting tonight because of my grandson. The whole reason you are having this meeting is not because of that, you all have discussed this for years. I don't live in the town, but my grandson was bitten by what we thought at the time was a feral cat in town limits. The town had to get involved because we had to go to the health department because he was bitten. Another thing I wanted to clear up was that he wasn't invading the cat's space. My grandson was at home in his fenced in yard in the Town of Bluefield, VA. This cat was just there. We had seen it several times and it never really bothered anything. Just like every one of us here has seen a stray or feral cat at some point. But I don't care what is considered stray or feral. The point is that there was an incident that happened. The cat had been hanging around the yard for about 45 minutes, enough time to know that there was a dog in the house, there was no sign that the cat was going to do what it did, and out of nowhere by them sitting on their outside patio, my grandsons arm was hanging down and this cat bit him in several places on his arm. It wasn't that he was invading the cat's space or anything like that. It just happened. But a day and a half later we had to seek medical attention so he got medical attention and we were sent to the health department and they had to investigate it. That's when the town got involved and they had town officers looking for the cat. She asked what would have happened if we had not found the cat and made sure the cat wasn't sick. We had a very short time limit of 10 days, my grandson would have had to go through the rabies treatments and that to me was a very big deal. So that's where the town had to get involved trying to help us because Pine Hill Park has several cats and we had to find the right cat. She stated that this went on for days trying to keep her grandson who is 8 from having to go through the rabies treatments. She stated that it was hard that was for her to face that, and she took him to the doctor, and to face what he may have to go through because of someone's negligence or a feral cat or whatever the case was. She stated that she has 2 miniature Dobson's at her house and that child's particular household has a kitten, dog and a rabbit. She stated that they were all about the pets. But it was not that, what upset her was and the reason she was there tonight was because there were people in our community who were going on social media and were bringing peoples families and their personal information out on social media platforms and voicing their opinions and putting their own twist on things but all they were doing was upsetting the community and getting people all amped up that the Town was out to kill all the cats and that was never the intention. She stated to clarify this, when it came from the county side that they needed to find this cat that bit her grandson and that was when Richmond got involved. She stated that they called us from the Richmond Health Department wanting to know what was going on. She stated that if her grandson would have shown any signs of symptoms, do you know what happens, there is no cure for rabies. So they were getting calls from the state and county asking if the cat had been found. She stated that they tried, the neighbors tried, the town officers tried because they had to make sure that cat wasn't sick to save her grandson from going through the mess of the rabies treatments. She stated that the window was closing in on them and on day 9 if memory served her correctly they just happened to spot the cat. She stated that within 10 days had a cat taken rabies it would start showing signs. She stated that the cat was not sick thank God but it had to be quarantined for 10 days to make sure it had no signs of rabies. She stated that the steps the officers took to not harm the cat whether it was a stray or feral was very

humane. She stated that they made sure it was humanly trapped so that it could be safely transported for quarantine and the information that was out there that the town was out to kill the cats was crazy to her because they thought the cat would be put down by a town officer or somebody else. She stated that they ended up having 3 officers that made contact with the cat and animal control to make sure the cat was ok and on day 9 she had 4 people call from the state and county saying they had made visual on the cat. She stated that they asked if the child was ok to not have to go through the rabies treatments and were told yes but had they not received that clarification then her grandson would have faced the treatments. She stated that she had personally trapped 2 feral cats humanly at her husband's business on the county side of the line and both had been fixed in the past 2 months and were released back because that was all they had ever known. She stated that there were 4 kittens out there right now that were probably 12 weeks old and she had been in contact with 2nd Chance for Cats to see what they could do about it. She stated that just because a cat was feral that it did not mean you could not change it and did not mean it could not be taken into someone's home and given a good home. She stated that before she left today she wanted to ask as a community that they try to find an answer to helping with the expense of getting an animal spayed or neutered because it was expensive. She stated as a town and a community that they needed to be able to work with these organizations that do such wonderful work and get some funding in there to where we can get the cat population under control by getting them fixed and getting them their vaccinations. She asked that they not use social media as our platform to bash a family when they did not know the facts about what happened. She stated that she knew time was limited but wanted to make sure everyone in the room understand the situation and the cat ended up not being feral. She stated that they had found out that the lady who owned the cat at one point had moved out of Pine Hill Park and left the cat to fend for itself and the last time it had shots was when it was a kitten and lived up behind where the incident occurred. She stated that they paid someone to come and feed the cat a few times a week and there were homes in Bluefield, VA and in the Pine Hill Park area where people were dumping bags and cans of cat food. She stated that you could feed a cat within reason and no one was telling them they could not feed them but you do not take a 25 lb. bag of cat food or 20 cans of cat food and just throw it down leaving the trash for the town to clean up. She stated that they needed to come together and come up with some ideas and help the families with the expense of getting the cats fixed. She asked if they went to social media to make sure the facts were right and not tag 50 people and spread rumors about someone's family. She asked that they make sure to check with the family first to see if they were ok with you naming them in your post. She stated that her grandson was not the reason they were having this meeting that it had been addressed numerous times and her grandson just brought it to light.

Mayor Harris thanked her for her presentation. He called upon Angel Boothe and she stated that her mother said it all for her. Mayor called upon Laura Hash Mills.

Laura Hash read the following... Good evening council members. I have been a resident of Bluefield, VA my entire life. I have been extremely active in the animal rescue community for the past 16 years. I have a good working relationship with both the Mercer County Animal Shelter and Tazewell County Animal Shelter, as well as an outstanding relationship with multiple vets in the two Virginias. I have been caring for a small cat colony for the last 2 years and have spent much of my own money making sure that these cats are fixed to cut down on the population, as well as vaccinated to make sure they are unable to spread disease. I volunteer my own personal time to trap these cats, drive them to the vet, spend my own money putting food out for them and placing winterized boxes out for them when it gets cold. The cats in return have provided a great service to me. They have killed many snakes venomous and non-venomous this past summer making it safe for my children to play. We also have a river rat, muskrat and

raccoon problem. The cats hunt and kill these animals. I am thankful for these cats' services. I ask that council not punish the good Samaritans like myself who are trying our best to handle the stray cat issue by using our own time, money and resources. It is virtually impossible and asinine to suggest that a single person assume ownership of a large number of cats simply because we are feeding them. But by imposing fines and citations upon good Samaritans who are trying to help, where others fall negligent would be burning valuable bridges. Rescue work is thankless, tiring, emotionally and physically draining. It's not a paid position, it is a volunteer one. We take time away from our children and families to try and give neglected abandoned animals a better quality of life. To punish us for trying to right the wrongs of others would be terribly wrong. I ask that council allow myself and a group of great volunteers to help the city combat this problem. Because we want the same thing here. We want these cats to be healthy and unable to reproduce, we want to relocate the ones that are friendly enough. But what we don't want is to be penalized for volunteering our time to try and make this happen. I personally will continue to volunteer much of my time to making sure that these cats posing a nuisance to Bluefield, VA are fixed and vaccinated. If funding becomes a problem my group of rescuers will do what we have always done. We will find a way to make it happen. We can do it humanly. When I first read the proposal in the Bluefield Daily Telegraph I was upset and was the reason why I called upon multiple people who are here tonight to speak to council and give them as much information as possible to validate the success rate of the trap, neuter and release program. If the city grants us permission to continue, I can almost say for certain come next summer the number of stray cats posing a nuisance to Bluefield, VA will be cut in half. I urge council to make the right decision today. I and my fellow rescuers want to work with Bluefield, VA to make this problem better for not only the citizens who live here but also for the animals who are homeless through no fault of their own. Thank you for your time and thank you for your consideration on what we have proposed today.

Mayor Harris called Becky Walker to come and speak. She stated that everything she wanted to say had already been said.

Mr. Freedman read letters/emails received from Katharine Nelson and Rajeev Chopra.

Mrs. Hernandez read a letter sent in from Elizabeth MacDonald and stated that all letters/emails read will be attached at the end of the minutes. Also attached will be an article provided by Elizabeth MacDonald regarding "Free to Roam: A Small City's New Policy that Saves Feline Lives and Tax Payers Money".

The mayor asked if there were any more comments.

There were none.

Mayor Harris stated that council had heard them and would ponder and make a decision at the next council meeting. He stated that they would get in contact with those willing to help.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:32 p.m.

Don Harris, Mayor

Kim Hernandez, Town Clerk

My name is Katharine Nelson. I am the President of the Mercer Co Spay Association. I have held this position for 9, going on 10, years. In the past, we have assisted those on the Virginia side, as well as the West Virginia side, when asked. Our group was chartered in 1997, and was one of the first in our area to attempt to achieve a humane answer to animal overpopulation. I have actively worked in animal rescue for over 40 years. As a child I was taught by my parents, Dr. Jim and Kitty Nelson, that you respect all life and try to give help and comfort where possible. These were lessons well learned, and in my opinion, just as important to teach today, as in my childhood.

I truly think all those who are here tonight are here to address the real need of intervention to control the overpopulation of animals, (specifically, the cat population), in the area. We can all agree that these animals are in need of actions that will allow them the freedom from reproducing over and over. I think we can also all agree that these animals are simply the symptom of humans who have abandoned or neglected their duty in being responsible pet owners.

That being said, I will share what about 40 years of animal rescue have taught me. Animals do not want to be a nuisance. If they are, look to their homes to see the reason. They can roam if they are not sterilized. Many who have been neglected in the areas of proactive health concerns such as spaying and neutering, are also not fed regularly, or food has any real nutritional quality. The roaming is often in search for more food.

Stray animals are most often much more afraid of you than you are of them. Lives of being chased by other animals, screamed at to leave areas, swatted at with brooms teach them to be very wary. Seldom do they approach strangers. If an animal approaches someone new to them, most likely this animal has had the ultimate betrayal and been dropped by owners who either cannot or will not continue the care needed.

These strays have an average life expectancy of 18 months...1 and one half years. This is due to the predators in the world around them, the diseases that they are exposed to, and the fact that our area has harsh winters. Some live...of should I say, "exist," a bit longer. Most much shorter. Once a colony has been spayed/neutered, attrition will bring the number down owing to the fact that most outside cats live an average of 1 and 1 half years.

Strays in managed colonies (this is regarding cats) have what are known as notched or tipped ears, to alert anyone seeing these cats that they are among a colony where the members have been spayed or neutered, and they have received rabies vaccinations. Members of these colonies receive food and shelter from those monitoring. These cats are also watched for any health issues, and, when possible, taken to a vet for care. All of this is done at the expense of the person/s managing the colony. Seldom do these cats roam, as their needs are addressed and this relieves them, and the community of this roaming.

If a colony of cats is eradicated, another is statistically shown to replace it the majority of the time. And, the process of trapping, spaying and neutering and vaccinating must be done, again.

These colonies actually work for their food and care. Where there are managed colonies, the rodent and snake problems are reported to be at a minimum.

Bluefield Virginia has some very forward thinking people. I was contacted by Mike Watson, during the early Spring or Summer of this year. He was seeking a group that would actively trap, spay/neuter,

vaccinate for rabies, and return/relocate the cats of need within the town limits. He, and those in his office, BJ and Dee, have been very available for my calls or input about this. They have been successful in assisting with the spay and neuter and vaccinating of many of those cats in need, to the present date. Add to this the information most recently made available by Kim Hernandez and the clarification of this information offered by Matt Freedman, is a, "best practice," for any leaders of a community, in my opinion.

Their proactive stand has made it possible to achieve exactly what I believe is the common goal of all in this meeting. The reduction in the continued litters of those cats without owners, or with owners who are not spaying/neutering and vaccinating.

I believe we have the right process in place. I also know that Bluefield, Va, ^{was} a number of Good Samaritans who have, and will continue to help neglected and abandoned cats (most especially). These folks go out in all types of weather to all types of situations to begin the process of correcting the wrongs done to these animals. In so doing, they are actually protecting all in the area from potential nuisance and/ or health situations. They are the unpaid boots on the ground who are more than willing to continue this, if not now having to face possible fines for attempting to do exactly what is wanted by all....effective and humane control of animals. To put punishments in place will stop any further work by these folks...and, the animals will continue to repopulate.

I propose that there be an exemption/an umbrella to protect those who are your greatest volunteer resource in humanely controlling the cat population. If these volunteers can show proof that they are working with an established/chartered rescue and/or are working directly with a local veterinarian to have these cats spayed/neutered and vaccinated for rabies, they would be exempt from any potential fines/legal actions in regard to caring for/feeding strays.

Poisons of any type are now reported to be forbidden for any City Worker to use, in Bluefield WV. This is based on the far reaching impact of these poisons. These poisons can not only cause the target animals horrific deaths, these poisons also have been tracked to cause the deaths of wildlife, of loved pets unfortunate enough to come across an animal that has ingested some, and in some cases, put children at risk who have been exposed to the animals who have eaten it. These poisons also have been reported to have been found in the water sources nearby. Any and/or all of these situations could bring about lawsuits.

The statistics have shown with consistent humane intervention of TNR (Trap, neuter and return) colonies of cats have been recorded to have reduced within 3 years. I will add that where relocation is a possibility, it is used.

My sincere thanks to the Board, to the Town Officials of Bluefield, Va, to the Homeowners Association of Sedgewood (Mr Richard Shumate), and to those who are concerned enough to attend this meeting. Together, we can be those stewards, who in the scriptures are charged with the care of the lesser being. We can model for our youth the very real need to learn to respect and offer responsible care to those who are without recourse.

Every identified serial killer in the US began as an animal abuser. By modeling humane behavior paired with humane control of the animals as risk, we are protecting our communities, once again.

I feel we are on the right track...with some adjustments, this can be the outcome needed and wanted by all.

Gandhi said it best, "The greatness of a nation, and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated."

Sincerely,

KATHARINE NELSON

Katharine Nelson

President of the Mercer Co Spay Association

Billie Roberts

From: Rajeev Chopra <r Chopra1928@icloud.com>
Sent: Monday, October 21, 2019 3:11 PM
To: roberts@bluefieldva.org
Subject: Animal ordinance

I was not able to attend meeting because of a death in family. I want to go on record that an ordinance needs to be passed so that stray animals are not feed and become a nuisance and health risk . If a stray animal bites a person that person will have to take rabies shots and be subjected other health precautions. These injections are painful and cost money. I personally have been bitten by a dog and have first hand experience with the health issues presented by stray animals. Also, if you have a pet and keep up shots and regular vet visits you know that stray animals can spread diseases to registered family pets. As a landlord stray pets create a nuisance and make it difficult to rent units to tenants that are scared of animals . Please consider these factors in making your decision.

Sent from my iPhone

Attn: Tim Hernandez

I have a terrible cold and cough and will not be able to attend.

I have put together a few thoughts to consider during your meeting tonight

First and foremost the term Feral cats is not an exact description of the cats living on the streets. Feral cats have never had human involvement in any way. Most cats that we now see are actually cats who once belonged to someone. Because we have lax spay, neuter laws these cats, when they become of the age to reproduce, are dumped somewhere to fend for themselves. Many of the colonies we go into have very nice cats that certainly deserved better than what they were dealt. I will use the term "Community Cat" going forward.

We received an anonymous grant on two occasions for spay, neuter services for community cats in the town limits of Bluefield, Va. So far, using this grant money we have been able to spay or neuter, and rabies vaccinate close to 50 cats. We realize this may be a drop in the bucket but it is a start. If we can continue to take care of these cats you will start to see a drop in the numbers of community cats free-roaming.

To take away the ability to care for these cats will cause further problems. You are penalizing the good hearted people while allowing the ones who dumped the cats in the first place to go free. When good Samaritans can no longer care for a colony because of retribution you are taking away their right to take care of god's creatures. A well taken care of cat reduces the risk of disease and if we can be hands on with the caretakers and have a good Trap Neuter Release program you will see a decrease as time goes by.

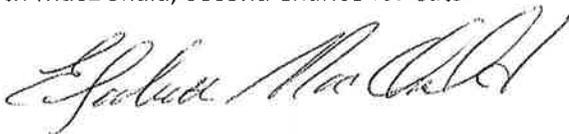
You are also increasing the burden of your local shelters and rescues. The shelter ultimately will be spending tax payer dollars and the rescue will be further burdened and most rescues survive off of donations and fundraising. Our rescue is run by two ladies who work tirelessly trying to help community cats. We started on a small scale in 2008 and in that period of time we have spayed or neutered, and rabies vaccinated 3,528 cats. We may not be able to take every cat that someone calls us about but we do offer, spay, neuter assistance or food to help feed.

We are willing to work closer with your community in helping your community cat issue. If you would like to set up a meeting we would be happy to come and talk with you.

Enclosures

Sincerely,

Elizabeth MacDonald, Second Chance for Cats





ATTN: Tina Hernandez

[Home](#) » [Maddie's Institute](#) » [Articles](#) » [Free to Roam](#)

Free to Roam: A Small City's New Policy that Saves Feline Lives and Tax Payer Money

May 2013

Gazing at a roomful of animal-lovers hoping to learn how to do more with less, Dr. Kate Hurley of the University of California, Davis, Koret Shelter Medicine Program worried that her words were falling on deaf ears when she looked at Tracy Mohr, the director of a municipal shelter with more than three decades of work in the animal welfare community.

"She asked hard questions, one after the other," the shelter medicine pioneer said. "If I had to pick one person I didn't think I was getting through to, I'd guess it was her."

Dr. Hurley now says she couldn't be happier that her impression was wrong. Mohr's questions weren't meant to tear apart the presentation; rather, Mohr explains, she was trying to understand what seemed to be too good to be true: that by refusing to take healthy cats into a municipal shelter, she could provide a better quality of service to those she serves in the Northern California college community of Chico - and she could do so while saving both lives and money.



"We have a very active animal welfare community here, with a lot of organizations and a lot of very active, concerned people," says Mohr. "Our humane society here brought Dr. Hurley up, and we all went and listened. I had been doing research on the idea of not taking in healthy cats, but I didn't quite get it until I heard Dr. Hurley. And then it clicked. I was like, 'Oh, that makes perfectly good sense.'"

It made so much sense to Mohr that as of February 1st of this year, the City of Chico's municipal shelter no longer accepts healthy cats. People who need to rehome a cat are directed to the non-profit Butte Humane Society, which had long taken cats from the city shelter. For feral cat colonies, the goal is trap-neuter-release unless the animals are in a location that's causing problems either for the animals or people. And the "stray cat" who just turns up one day? In Chico you'll be advised to ignore her: she'll be much more likely to find her way home from a backyard in her neighborhood than a cage in one of the shelters.

But leaving healthy cats where they are unless they're in trouble or causing trouble runs counter to decades of common practice that says, in effect, the safest place for any loose animal is in a shelter.

Mohr knew that wasn't so. In fact, being taken to a shelter means a high chance of death for a cat in many cities and towns. Untamed ferals have almost no chance at rehoming, and owned cats are very unlikely to be reunited with their owners. Mohr realized that Dr. Hurley was right: taking healthy cats in only to kill them - when they became ill or when space and time ran out - was applying solutions that worked for dogs without considering that the needs and lives of cats are very different indeed.

For example, Dr. Hurley points out that landing in a shelter is a good thing if you're a dog. "People know when a dog is missing," she says. "And they know it right away. The dog was here, and now he's not. That's not true with cats. It's not uncommon for an owned cat to be missing for a while, and an owner won't start looking because the cat always came back before. Until the cat doesn't: 67% of lost cats are reunited with their owners simply by returning on their own. But only 2% of shelter cats are claimed by their owners."

"With all our efforts in shelters to reunite cats with their owners, more commonly what we're doing is killing people's pets," said Dr. Hurley.

With her long experience in sheltering, Mohr agreed that change meant dealing with the cat as a cat. Or at least not like a dog. Maybe more like...a raccoon, or a skunk. No one would ever suggest that there was enough money or man-hours to eradicate entire populations of wild species in urban areas. Instead, the strategy is to remove dangerous or nuisance animals and help wild animals in trouble. The same strategy works for cats, says Dr. Hurley, and Mohr agrees.

"Take people complaining that there's a cat in their yard, going to the bathroom in their garden. If they trap that cat, really, is that going to solve the problem? No, because there are probably more cats in the neighborhood. Trapping will be an exercise in futility," said Mohr. "There are always going to be 15,000 cats in Chico, and we are not going to trap every one of those cats and eliminate them. What we're counseling people to do, the same way we counsel them with wildlife, is to use strategies that make a yard less attractive for a cat. Instead of saying, 'Just trap it and we'll take it away,' they're being given the same message as when somebody calls whether it's a skunk or a cat. The problem gets solved by leaving the animal alone in most cases, and we're using our community to solve it."

Related Links

[Feline Shelter Intake Reduction Program FAQs](#)

[Video: Keeping Community Cats Out of Shelters](#)

[Making the Case for a Paradigm Shift in Community Cat Management, Part One](#)

[Making the Case for a Paradigm Shift in Community Cat Management, Part Two](#)

Maddie's Fund - Free to Roam: A Small City's New Policy that Saves Feline Lives and Ta... Page 2 of 3

Mohr seems a little surprised at how well the abrupt change of course has been received in the community. "We went on the radio, and we had a couple of articles in the paper, and that helped," she said. "The change has been well-received. To be fair, we have had a couple of situations where people have come in with cats we would not take, but most people, when you talk to them and you explain why we're doing what we're doing, they understand, they get it. They're like, 'Oh yeah, that makes sense.'

"And it helps that everyone's unified here," she said. "They can call the Humane Society, and they get the same message."

Chico's cat policy is so new that any evaluation is probably premature; still, the numbers are going in the right direction, according to Mohr.

"If you look at 2012, in February we had 60 cats come in, in March we had 99 cats and in April we had 147 cats come in. Then for this year, we had 15 cats come in February and 24 in March," she said, noting that April's numbers, while not yet complete, showed a similar drop. And while keeping healthy cats in place means keeping them alive, the policy change allows the shelter to have more resources to help cats who need it.

"Six months ago I was thinking, gosh, do we need to get a portable classroom so we can get extra space? And now we're like, we have space," said Mohr. "When an animal comes in that needs help, the staff's not stressed, we have resources to care for them, and you know, it's just a whole different outlook. Instead of saying, 'Oh my gosh, here's another box of kittens that somebody's going to dump on us,' it's more like, 'Let's see what we can do to find a solution for your situation.'"

The bottom line, says Mohr, is a collaborative effort aimed at problem-solving, using strategies that actually work with and for cats.

Dr. Hurley points out the irony that it's often not the shelters with the most resources that institute real change, but those that are just looking for any way to cope with problems that seemingly have no solutions.

"That's because the solutions never were solutions," she said. "When you take non-solutions off the table for whatever reason, new ways of doing things are often found."