

**CITY OF COSTA MESA  
ANIMAL SERVICES COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES: JANUARY 25, 2023**

**CALL TO ORDER:** The Animal Services Committee meeting was called to order by Chair Walls at 4:00 p.m. on January 25, 2023 via Zoom webinar.

**ROLL CALL**

**Present:** Chair Becca Walls, Vice Chair Angela Minjares, Committee Members Dianna Gardiner, Lisa Harker, Steve Parker, Christina Poulos, and Jennifer Tanaka

**Absent:** Alternate Committee Member Emily Cummings-Nelson and Elise Gates

**Liaison Present:** Mayor John Stephens

**Staff Present:** Jessica Torrejon, Recreation Coordinator; Tracy Habiger, Assistant Recreation Supervisor; Ashley Thomas, Recreation Supervisor, Monique Villasenor, Recreation Manager; Jason Minter, Parks and Community Services Director

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Chair Walls opened public comments.

Lisa Price, Executive Director of Priceless Pet Rescue, introduced herself to the committee and spoke about three accepted animals transferred into her care that required additional medical needs. Ms. Price explained the care provided for each animal and additional costs that should be included in the shelter services contract. She announced that Priceless Pet Rescue will not be accepting cases like these animals anymore as they are being directed against it by their board members and such treatments are not financially feasible for her organization. Ms. Price asked for the committee to help figure out who will be financially responsible for medical treatments like the ones these three animals needed moving forward.

Public comment was closed by Ms. Fautua after allotted three minutes were up to speak.

**MOTION/SECOND:** Chair Walls motioned to extend Ms. Price's allocated three-minute comment time. / Second by Vice Chair Minjares. The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

**Ayes:** Chair Walls, Vice Chair Minjares, Committee Member Gardiner, Harker, Parker, Poulos, and Tanaka.

**Nays:** None

**Absent:** None

**Motion Carries:** 7-0

Ms. Price provided an update on the three animals and reiterated that she would like for it to be identified as to who will be financially responsible for these types of medical situations, as those costs should not be absorbed solely by her organization to make sure these animals are medically sound.

Ms. Fautua asked if there are any other public comments.

Seeing no further hands raised, Public Comments was closed.

### **COMMITTEE MEMBER AND LIAISON COMMENTS**

Committee Member Tanaka informs the committee of a public comment made at the last City Council meeting regarding the Bark Park's recent frequent closures and renovations. She acknowledged the recent rain was made, but asked if the Bark Park can be discussed at a future committee meeting.

Chair Walls shared the history of the committee and its purpose, as well as the reasons the City moved away from previous contractors into the current system. Chair Walls asked the Committee to review what is being sent to them from staff so they can be aware of what is going on and to ask questions.

Mayor John Stephens mentioned his involvement with the City's animal care, provided a brief history of the Committee, acknowledged his concerns with what Ms. Price mentioned to the committee, and the need to address the concern of both caring for an animal and its fiscal concerns. Mayor Stephens asked for staff to follow-up with him outside of the meeting to work on a solution.

Committee Member Gardner stated she was not aware of the Committee's primary reason was to provide oversight of the contracts and scope of services and inquired how the committee will be moving forward on the issues that were mentioned.

Vice Chair Minjares states what Lisa Price shared is disturbing and that there have been previous problems with the shelter not providing care to the animals being transferred to Priceless Pets Rescue.

Ms. Minjares adds that there needs to be a closer look at the contracts, to ensure the shelter is being held accountable for providing health care and surgeries, and that contract expectations should be made clear to both contractors.

Monique Villasenor introduces herself as the Parks & Community Services Recreation Manager and asks the Committee if they would like to bring more information about the creation of the Animal Services Committee to review its history, duties, goals and objectives.

Chair Walls asked to agendize the history of the Animal Care Services Committee at a future meeting.

Ms. Thomas mentioned the return to in-person meetings to the committee and that staff would be providing more details regarding time and location and thanked the committee for their input.

Ms. Torrejon provided the committee with an update on TNR (Trap, Neuter, Release) Program, informed them that staff reached out to Orange County Animal Care regarding their TNR Program for more information soon, and thanked the Committee members who volunteered at the "Barktoberfest" Pet Event in October.

## **1. APPROVAL OF THE SEPTEMBER 28, 2022 MEETING MINUTES**

Chair Walls asked for a correction to her comments in Item 3 New Business to read “allow the contractor to train their volunteers and be managed by the Contactor not the City.”

Ms. Torrejon confirmed to Chair Walls that adjustment will be made.

**MOTION/SECOND:** Vice Chair Minjares motioned to approve the September 28, 2022 meeting minutes with the corrected verbiage. / Second by Chair Walls. The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Chair Walls, Vice Chair Minjares, Committee Member Gardiner, Harker, Parker, and Poulos.

Nays: None

Absent: None

Abstain: Committee Member Tanaka

Motion Carries: 6-0-0-1

## 2. OLD BUSINESS

None

## 3. NEW BUSINESS

### a. Review of Priceless Pet Rescue Professional Services Agreement

Ms. Thomas reminded the committee on the review of Priceless Pets Rescue Professional Services Agreement.

Ms. Torrejon asked the committee if they all got a chance to review the scopes of services.

Committee Member Gardiner informed Ms. Torrejon she has not had the chance to review the scopes, but will do so.

Ms. Thomas clarified the goal of the committee is to go through the current contract in detail, provide some feedback on the scope of services, and asked if anyone has any feedback.

Chair Walls asked to address the California Codes in Section 2, currently included in the scopes under “Adoption Partner”, to provide specific codes that refer to animal shelters and not pet stores, to update fees that are payed to the contractor being \$25, and wants to further expand on what would be considered an elective procedure.

Chair Walls added to further expand on the defining how much space is needed per animal especially if the animals are staying at the shelter a longer time.

Vice Chair Minjares wants to further define the additional payment of \$125 per animal for other medical needs.

Chair Walls wants to further expand on what is being considered with those fees and

recommended both contracts to be put up for Request for Proposal.

Vice Chair Minjares wants to consider the industry standard of payment instead of a stagnant fee depending on medical necessities and survival viability.

Chair Walls expressed concern for the animal's care in shelter then getting sick once transferred to adoption contractor.

Chair Walls wants consider the addition to medical paperwork that provides full treatment provided so that it is known what exactly an animal has been given treatment for incase the animal falls ill within the 10-day return time after transfer.

Chair Walls wants to clarify why the \$125 is under fees.

Ms. Thomas informed Chair Walls the \$125 is no longer listed and asks Ms. Habiger to further expand.

Ms. Habiger informs the committee the fees were updated on Amendment three under Scopes of Services and the fees are still \$25 per animal, but the \$125 fee is no longer on the contract.

Chair Walls suggested removing the requirement of the contractor to facilitate animal licensing of adopted animals as it might not be realistic for them to do that.

Chair Walls would like to include that the City can designate a Council Member or Committee Member to conduct walkthroughs at each facility.

Chair Walls thinks the Contractor should be allowed to oversee their own business model so the City is not limited to contractor options.

Ms. Tanaka asked about the post transfer of medical procedures, clarified if Newport Center Animal Hospital is the City's animal shelter services provider, and shared ambiguity about who is responsible for elective veterinary care.

Chair Walls responded to Ms. Tanaka by saying there is an industry standard reflected in the contract; however, it is not being followed or held accountable.

Ms. Tanaka shared that the two contracts do not stand back-to-back with one another and asked for the committee to re-review the shelter contract as it seems that Newport Center Animal Hospital is responsible for all veterinary care until adopted.

Ms. Tanaka asked if this is a matter of needing to enforce the contract because Priceless Pet Rescue does not have any standing to enforce the contract against Newport Center Animal Hospital because they are a third-party to the contract not in privy with Newport Center.

Ms. Tanaka asked if Priceless Pets Rescue is saying something is medically necessary and Newport Center is saying something is not medically necessary but elective and will not provide treatment, and is this a matter of the City not stepping in to enforce the contract because of its ambiguity.

Ms. Villasenor said that the purpose of bringing the contracts to the committee is to evaluate the needs and clarify the needs for a better scope in the future.

Ms. Tanaka said she appreciates Ms. Price's conundrum; however, she feels like the contract she signed is clear that elective procedures are their responsibility.

Ms. Tanaka expressed that she is unsure it matters how "elective" is defined in the contract except to the extent that the contract will be holding Priceless Pet Rescue financially responsible.

Ms. Tanaka asked to also open up the Newport Center Animal contract to further expand on their care.

Chair Walls informed Ms. Tanaka that the shelter contract was reviewed at the last meeting and added the contracts should be reviewed and both be put out for proposals.

Chair Walls requested the link to last meeting for those members that missed it could get caught up for Newport Center Animal Hospital.

Ms. Villasenor responded by saying that the link can be sent out and asked for the committee to email any suggestions they may have to staff.

Ms. Minjares asked if both contracts can be reviewed before they are signed.

Ms. Villasenor informed the committee the contract would be brought to them at a point, but is subject to council approval.

Chair Walls asked what would be an alternative.

Ms. Villasenor informed the Committee that both contracts currently have one extension left and those extensions can be evaluated.

Chair Walls inquired about the time frame on the scopes of services.

Ms. Villasenor informed the Committee they can be updated in between meetings.

Mayor Stephens asked if the City Attorney is reviewing the contracts.

Ms. Villasenor informed Mayor Stephens that the City is working on gathering information for the scopes of services.

Mayor Stephens asked about the agreements and if there is a dispute over contract interpretation who decides within City staff.

Ms. Villasenor informed Mayor Stephen that is in on a case by case scenario; however, those disputes would filter through the Director or the City Attorney.

Mayor Stephens asked who made the decision of Priceless Pets to incur the fees for treatment.

Ms. Thomas informed Mayor Stephens that Newport Center Animal Hospital provided a medical synopsis, which was given to Lisa Price and she decided to accept the animals as is.

Mayor Stephens asked to include this situation in the contract in case of a dispute regarding the contract.

Jason Minter, Parks and Community Services Director, informed Mayor Stephens that Chair Walls requested to review the agreements for both contractors try to close any gray areas that are between the contracts. Mr. Minter offered to schedule a special meeting for further review if needed.

Mayor Stephens suggests there should be an advisory body when the scopes of services come into question.

A discussion ensued regarding the contractor's duties within contracts, how to ensure the contract is followed, establishing a timeline for elective procedures, and considering risk of surgery and animal survival rate after surgeries.

Chair Walls added there should not be any contact between the contractors except for the transfer of animals and any other conversations should be with the City liaisons.

Ms. Thomas asks if anyone else has any comments.

No other comments were made by the committee.

Ms. Thomas suggested a study session or a special meeting in between meetings.

Committee agreed they would like to have a special meeting.

Mr. Minter suggested emailing their comments to staff so they are properly documented and shared with all Committee members.

Mr. Minter informs the Committee that meetings were not scheduled to go to in person until March so any special meeting before them night need to be in Zoom.

Ms. Thomas informs the Committee that staff will check for availability and let the Committee know soon.

Ms. Fautua opened public comments.

Seeing no hands raised, public comments was closed.

**MOTION/SECOND:** Vice Chair Minjares motioned to approve an in-person special meeting to review the contracts. / Second by Committee Member Gardiner. The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Chair Walls, Vice Chair Minjares, Committee Member Gardiner, Harker, Parker, Poulos, and Tanaka.

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion Carries: 7-0

#### **4. WORKING GROUP UPDATES**

##### **a. Beekeeping Ordinance**

Committee Member Parker stated the group has gathered information and will begin to put the information in a report that will be presented to Animal Control.

b. Community Outreach

Ms. Torrejon asked the Committee to send her any information they would like to see provided as educational material to have at special events.

c. Events & Education

Vice Chair Minjares mentioned they have begun to gather a list of various animal related businesses, such as pet stores, to ask if they can post educational material or advertise for the contractors.

Committee Member Gardiner added that she has spoken to a few businesses and they are on track.

## 5. MONTHLY REPORTS

a. Animal Care Services Statistics

Ms. Torrejon presented the statistics for September, October, November, and December 2022.

Chair Walls asks about the euthanasia stats, their accuracy, and expressed concern on the euthanasia rate going up.

Chair Walls asks about nine dogs listed on the December stats as "Born in Care" and said it is written in the contracts that Priceless Pet Rescue receive babies to foster.

Chair Walls said she checked in with Priceless Pet Rescue if they received the puppies and they said they did not and is assuming the babies were born in care.

Chair Walls requested an update to the puppies listed as "Born in Care".

Ms. Torrejon informed the Committee that the puppies have been diagnosed with Parvo and are currently receiving treatment.

Ms. Torrejon informed the committee that one puppy has since died and that staff are tracking the remaining puppies' health status and checking in with Newport Center Animal Hospital.

Ms. Torrejon informed the committee that once treatment is completed the puppies will eventually transfer to Priceless Pets Rescue for adoption.

Chair Walls thanked Ms. Torrejon for the update and explained the danger of Parvo to the Committee and how it is highly contagious and dangerous and, in some cases, euthanasia is appropriate because they are suffering.

Chair Walls asked for the next steps after the puppies are cleared of Parvo and spoke to the Committee about how now they will have a better understanding of why those dogs died in care and there are no further questions.

Vice Chair Minjares asks if it is possible to provide reasons for euthanasia.

Chair Walls noted the cat euthanasia rate, the importance of TNR, and how it would play into sheltering and animal services. She also mentioned these rates might increase during kitten season.

## **6. ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Walls adjourned the meeting at 5:28 p.m.