

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

Interagency cooperation is topic of impromptu ASCMV workshop

by Frank Bryce

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In an unprecedented and positive move, the Animal Service Center of Mesilla Valley board of directors conducted an impromptu workshop session on March 27 to discuss interagency cooperation on issues involving the ASCMV.

The workshop arose as a result of the criminal complaints filed against the ASCMV director by the Doña Ana County Sheriff's Department Animal Cruelty Coordinator.

The workshop topic was limited to a discussion of interagency cooperation, and it was stated the criminal complaint issues would have to be addressed in another arena.

Attending the meeting was an assistant district attorney, the Las Cruces City Human Resources director, the ASCMV director and her personal attorney, the County Community Development director, Doña Ana County animal cruelty coordinator, both Las Cruces and Doña Ana County animal control department supervisors, and five of the six ASCMV board members.

It is important that the topic of interagency cooperation finally came to fruition and brought the three entities of both animal control departments and the animal cruelty division together in a consolidated effort to address issues.

Many of the issues identified are long-standing and have been brought before the ASCMV board by the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico many times over recent years.

An attempt at developing a path to resolve issues was initiated by the Coalition of Pets and People at its inception, with the establishment of the shepherd team.

There was apparent resistance by the government agencies and other stakeholders to the value of this team to develop understanding and effective approaches.

This has been demonstrated by what seems to be the lack of common resolve to address mutually shared problems, and the failure of the team to meet regularly despite the urging of outside entities.

This effort should be restarted with vigor and genuine dedication with inclusion of outside stakeholders.

The effort can be the catalyst to initiate a collaborative atmosphere between government agencies and extend it more uniformly to animal advocacy groups and individuals.

Past relationships have been rife with lack of communication and vagaries of interpretation. There has been a disparity of the enforcement of ordinances between agencies and compliance by outside stakeholders.

There has been a resistance to change, a lack of transparency and failure to establish trust. Coveted control, longtime outmoded administration agendas, and — quite literally — years of mistrust on the part of all those involved have hampered problem resolution. The workshop should be the start of a new path.

The direction sought is pet and pet-owner service improvements by all involved that benefit animals, pet owners and that contribute to the mission of agencies and organizations involved.

These improvements include spay and neuter, microchipping, pet retention, field and shelter return of pets, community cat management, and assistance with compliance on pet-owner responsibility.

They also include the care, maintenance and management of animals held at the ASCMV.

A suggestion was made that the ASCMV policy and management manual be reviewed to assure compliance with existing ordinances when dealing with government agencies and the public.

Late in the session, attendees were provided a compilation of comments and concerns developed jointly by the animal control departments and animal cruelty coordinator.

However, there was no opportunity to review the material and that is being done subsequently.

This review may contribute to greater action to accomplish what is a positive beginning to resolution of concerns.

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