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## Animal services improvements continue in Levy County



**Levy County Animal Services Director David Weatherford speaks about what is needed to provide adoption events.**

**Story and Photo By Jeff M. Hardison © Dec. 21, 2016 at 4:47 p.m.**

**BRONSON** -- Sarah Podobinski enjoyed more than a three-minute time period to address the Levy County Commission on Tuesday morning (Dec. 20) during the "public comments" portion of the agenda.

However, through the half-hour discussion between Podobinski, the five members of that board -- Chairman John Meeks and commissioners Rock Meeks, Matt Brooks, Lilly Rooks and Mike Joyner; and Levy County Animal Services Director David Weatherford, Levy County Animal Veterinarian Dr. Darlene Esler and others, it became clear that humans dealing with the dog and cat over-population issue in the county have improved the situation, and it is continuing to improve.

There were several sub-topics addressed during the meeting.

### **HOURS OF OPERATION**

Podobinski opened her list of suggestions for revising the current operations by mentioning the concept of changing the hours of operation.

The current office hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Monday through Friday.

By opening on Saturdays, and perhaps closing on Mondays instead, this would provide more opportunities for people who work during the week to visit the animal compound on the weekend, she said, and increase chances for adoptions.

Alachua and Marion counties are open for adoptions Tuesdays through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., she said.

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The Levy County Transfer Station (landfill or dump) is open on Saturdays, she added. There is also an on-call animal control officer available Saturdays and Sundays, she said, and he cleans kennels during that time as well.

Podobinski mentioned that Columbia County does not have Saturday hours, but it is open until 6 p.m., and that allows some adopting interests more time to find a pet there.

Gilchrist County offers Saturday and Sunday hours by appointment only, she continued.

She then started speaking about rescue groups that also are helped by Saturday hours. Rescue groups take dogs and then resell them.

Chairman Meeks said four of the six employees at Levy County Animal Services have children, who often have activities on weekends.

“If we change our hours,” Meeks said, “then that takes away from people having the ability to spend time with their families.”

Meeks said one of the first possible considerations for modification in Levy County could be to have people see animals by appointment on Saturdays.

County Commissioner Rock Meeks said people can look online at animals that are able to be adopted. Perhaps if a person saw one of those and needed to visit on a Saturday, that could be arranged.

Click [HERE](#) for a list of animals available for adoption at this shelter.

Animal Services Director Weatherford, after being invited to the podium by County Commissioner Lilly Rooks, spoke about other aspects.

Weatherford said he has asked his person on call on Saturdays to meet numerous times already with rescue groups, and that has happened.

Podobinski said that is true.

Commissioner Rooks said another new option is having adoptions at the Animal Services location at the kennels next to the Solid Waste Transfer Station (the dump) once every three months.

Chairman Meeks reminded Podobinski and others that cats are available for adoption too.

## **CATS**

Bob Echols of Ocala, the founder and president of For Our Friends The Animals funded the construction of a new cat room for the felines.

That story can be seen by clicking [HERE](#).

## **VOLUNTEERS**

Podobinski then requested being able to have more volunteers approved to help with adoptions.

By using volunteers, the once every three months adoption events might be able to happen more frequently on Saturdays at the kennels, she said, because Weatherford would not have to stretch his budget by paying as much overtime.

Rooks said she is working with Weatherford to improve on methods and hours for adoptions.

Podobinski said she and the other people who are trying to increase adoptions and rescues, and reduce euthanasia and kenneling of dogs and cats in Levy County, want to work with Weatherford and the County Commission to reach that goal.

Chairman Meeks said he concurs with Podobinski and he reminded her of the significant progress made by the department in the past number of years.

## **MUNICIPAL FEES**

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Yankeetown Mayor Debra Weiss asked why the people of Yankeetown are charged \$12 per animal collected in the city.

“if somebody brings in (to the pound) a stray dog, you don’t charge them anything?” she asked Weatherford.

He said that is correct.

However if Yankeetown Animal Control brings an animal there, the city is charged \$12 an animal.

Mayor Weiss said she believes that city residents pay for this county service through ad valorem property taxes.

Every city must have its own animal control, Weiss said, but the city residents pay county ad valorem property taxes too.

“There’s not a State of Florida Animal Control that we can take ours to,” Chairman Meeks said, “and we pay taxes to the state.”

Meeks said this is how political subdivisions of government are divided for different levels of local control, and local services funded by the taxing authorities for those different geographical areas.

Meeks went on to explain that the individual county taxpayer who brings the animal from within the city limits is not charged \$12, but the city government’s animal control department is charged \$12 per animal dropped off. It is the taxpaying citizen and not the taxpaying government that is given no fee for the dropoff.

“You’re preaching to the choir,” Meeks told Weiss. “We had a cat problem here and I raised sand with the city of Bronson, and they went back to trapping them.

“They pay \$12 to take the courthouse cats down to animal control,” Chairman Meeks continued. “You don’t think I got beat up about that?”

He told the municipal leaders in Bronson that “These are your cats. They are in your city. They’re under your courthouse,” Meeks said.

Those cats were in city traps, he continued, not county traps.

## **BOTTOM LINE**

The proverbial bottom line is that the county administration is continuing to improve the system for helping have cats and dogs to be adopted or rescued from Levy County, rather than just keeping them in kennels or killing them.

The new added method is going to be adoptions at the Animal Services site once every three months.

The website for hours of operation, fees and directions to visit the Levy County Animal Services main office can be seen by clicking [HERE](#).