

Animal Services Advisory Board Meeting -ASAB

***Date:** 11/17/25

***Roll Call:**

Board Members Present:

Ethelyn Riley (Chair),
Karen Gaskins (Asst. Chair),
Courtney Pearce (Director of Paws, Inc.-non-voting member),
Dr. Joey Brown,
Danielle Saunders,
Matt Gilbert,
Donna McGinnis,
Kirven Boyce

***Absent:** Anna-Claire Daniels

***Discussion:**

Ethelyn read the "Chair's Agenda" and made a motion to approve the UGA School of Law to assist the Advisory Board with updating the Muscogee County Code of Ordinances, Chapter 5: ANIMALS and FOWL.

Donna seconded the motion.

Ethelyn called for a vote.

Results: It passed unanimously

***Old Business:**

Matt discussed the ecological impact of feral cats. If feral cats are fed and sterilized, they still kill wildlife. It's a public health risk. Cats are the most rabid domestic animals. Releasing domestic animals without proper care is abandonment and there should be prosecution.

Columbus should have science and measurable outcomes, not ideology.

Ethelyn said the studies she has looked at have mixed reactions. Courtney said it's hard to get a grant for TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return). Someone has to pay for these surgeries. That is the major roadblock. It's a barrier. Ethelyn asked that when someone brings in a wild feral cat, would it be the time to maybe euthanize?

End goal: Have no more feral cats in the population. Sterilize all so they can't reproduce. Courtney said that sterilizing would get the same results as euthanizing 70-75% of feral cats population. Matt said that feral cats are an invasive species. Ethelyn said that she read a PETA report, and they believe that TNR is not working. Courtney said she wished that she had more time to bring us the research.

Columbus City Councilor Charmaine Crabb asked Karen to help a Muscogee County Schools Board member Vanessa Jackson, who is the Director/owner of a local daycare center. The issue is there are many feral cats on the daycare center's playground. Karen said the Feds would come in and shut her daycare center down if the children don't get enough play time outside. Karen has given Mrs. Jackson a list of options to use to try to get rid of the feral cats on her playground.

Matt said that Athens, Ga. has an ordinance that cats must have a leash on or they will be put in a holding center. Courtney said that if that's the path we choose, then we are no longer a "No-Kill Community". Ethelyn asked if there's some way to balance the two? If TNR is not as effective, is there another approach? Courtney said that if a cat comes to Paws in poor condition (even injury), not thriving, and she agrees that abandonment is a crime, then the animal does not go back out. They can perform the treatment. If Paws Vet says the animal (cat) should be euthanized, then yes it will be euthanized. If it's a treatment of a cat at Paws Clinic, then the cat would be treated and released back into the community. Ethelyn asked how many stray cats come in? Courtney said doesn't know and would need to pull reports. Karen knows of a situation in which a man trapped 92 feral cats in a cat colony. Dr. Brown said that we will never get a hold of the total cat colony population. Matt said that if TNR is used, the nuisance cats can get caught. He said that the Ga. Code is

that feral cats that get scooped up should be euthanized. (?) Karen asked if it's possible to microchip a cat? Courtney said yes and that Paws clips the cats' ears too. Courtney said that a lot of people are abandoning animals. Karen asked what can we do about the control of cats in Columbus?

Ethelyn said that it's a problem when cats affect someone's business- now that's a real problem, Courtney said that Paws wants to assist people (like the daycare center owner) so they can help by educating people, trapping the animals, etc. Paws can provide those services.

Dr. Brown told Matt that he is not wrong, but that it would be impossible to gather all feral cats and euthanize them. She said it won't solve the entire problem, and that Courtney has a "No Kill Cloud" hanging over her every day. She said yes, cats are out of control, and she gets calls at work about them every day. Courtney said that again, Paws wants the same results, but Paws is never going to stop people from feeding cats. Then, the cats reproduce! Dr. Brown said that people are part of the problem.

Matt stated when a feral cat is on property and is a repeated nuisance, then that cat should be scooped up/euthanized-especially if that cat has been a nuisance. Ethelyn said if a cat comes in, then it's TNR'ed, and then it's placed back into the community where it came from. A "community cat" gets clipped, and it's an altered cat. Matt said that the community owns the community cat. Ethelyn said it warrants more discussion, and we can get Vanessa and the Columbus Police together to help the daycare center owner's business.

***New Business:**

Karen said that Section 5.3 -Animal Control Advisory Board- changed to Ga. License Vet Tech. Ordinance changed it to: License Vet/Vet Tech, not a resident of Columbus, 2-year term.

Karen talked to Lindsay, and it will come up before the City Council. Karen texted City Councilor Byron Hickey and sent it to City Assistant Attorney Lucy Sheftall - table that request at the City Council meeting tomorrow. Karen said there's a motion on the floor that a change be made immediately. It will be the 1st Reading tomorrow night at the City Council meeting. Karen called a motion to change it. Ethelyn seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Kirven asked Courtney when would we, the Board, receive the updated ordinances from Sherri Hines, UGA lawyer? Courtney said it could be months to get it back. Kirven told Courtney that Judge Gil McBride, Chair of the Harrison County Animal Board, would like to receive a copy of the updated ordinances so Harris County ordinances be similar to ours. Donna said the ordinances will go through City Attorneys Clifton Fay and Lucy Sheftall.

Matt asked who enforces the state's kennel laws? He said that 37 people on "Rover" that don't have a kennel license, board up to 30+ dogs. It's listed on Facebook. Courtney said that it's "complaint based" and an investigation is followed, if say, someone has 20+ dogs. Karen hopes the Columbus Chief of Police, Stoney Mathis, will see the need and prioritize animal issues in the community. He and the police force are prioritizing daily crime and violence in the community first, and it takes up much of their time and attention. She wants a specialized unit to be formed to include enough officers and 3 detectives.

Karen told Courtney that the "Animal Abuse/Neglect" Training was great! Courtney said she sees the need for partnerships, and it takes time. She has not had a lot of time with Chief Mathis and has sent him several emails. She wants a conversation with him. She said that maybe he would not have the cases he prioritized if they had taken care of the animal cases. We learned in the recent training that a lot of animal abuse cases are related to crime cases in the same homes. Courtney would be happy to sit down and talk to someone in the police department.

Danielle asked if the ASO's are deputized? Courtney said that they are sworn in. Matt asked how "Rover" could be held accountable? Courtney said that it would be a state issue, a Department of Agriculture issue. Dr. Brown told Matt that if someone is boarding animals illegally, then he should ask the Department of Agriculture to investigate. Danielle said to report it to the Dept. of Agriculture, get their Director involved, go through each step, and get the State Attorney involved if they want to pursue it.

The Meeting was adjourned at 5:18 PM

Summary of ASAB Meeting 11-17-2025

All members were present except for Anna Claire Daniel.

Old business centered around the problems that feral cats cause in the community. PAWS currently adheres to TNR guidelines. When a business is affected, Courtney would like to speak with the business owner and provide assistance.

New business consisted of needing an immediate correction to the ASAB membership. Matt asked who enforces the state's kennel laws and Danielle referred him to the Department of Agriculture. Everyone agreed that the Animal Abuse/Neglect training provided by the UGA School of Law was excellent. It was confirmed that ASOs are sworn into office, although they are not deputized,