



**SURFSIDE BEACH TOWN COUNCIL
WORKSHOP MINUTES – FERAL CAT PROGRAM
AUGUST 20, 2015 AT 3:00 P.M.
TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

CALL TO ORDER.

Mayor Samples called the workshop to order at 3:00 p.m. Mayor Samples, Mayor Pro Tempore Pellegrino, and Councilmembers Childs, Mabry, Magliette, and Stevens were in attendance. Councilmember Johnson was absent. A quorum was present. Others present: South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) Representative Vicki Blair; Cynthia Todd, former animal officer for the City of Myrtle Beach, and Administrator Fellner.

Mayor Samples said this workshop would be restricted to a briefing on the feral cat program, as the public had several previous opportunities to express opinions.

Ms. Blair said the first notice that she had about a rodent problem in town was several weeks ago. Before responding to the complaint, she contacted Mr. Childs who told her about the town's efforts being taken to resolve the problem. About 20-years ago there were many, many rodent-related complaints throughout the hotel district and the Dunes neighborhood in Myrtle Beach. DHEC did not have an answer and communicated with the Centers for Disease Control without getting any help. Trapping and poisons were not options, because of the potential to affect other animals. She began researching similar problems in other places and found that a feral cat program was used in the Charleston area. She met with the lady that instituted the program to get the details. She presented the details to her supervisor and then worked with the Grand Strand Humane Society to present it to the city, which chose implement the program.

Ms. Blair explained that over four or five years, about 25 cats were utilized. DHEC never received a complaint about any problems with the cats. When complaints were received about rodents, a feral cat was introduced to the complainant who was asked to accept responsibility for placing food out for the cat to keep it in the area. The cats' nature was to hunt, so they would prey on rodents. The cats were neutered or spayed; tagged with numbers to identify them as city workers; given rabies vaccinations, and cages were put in out-of-sight areas where the cat was kept about a week with daily food and water to acclimate it to the area. After that, the cage door was opened to allow the cat to come and go. The cage stayed in place, and food was supplied daily for another week, then cage was taken away. Veterinarians partnered with the city to care for the cats, including Ark Animal Hospital here in Surfside Beach.

Ms. Bair said about mid-way through the program, DHEC received a call that a tagged worker cat had been hit. It was within a block of the location where it had been set out two years prior. That let them know that at least some of the cats remained where they were released. The problem she saw for the town was that there was no dedicated animal control. She believes the town already has many feral cats. When she served on council, it was a topic discussed, and she was not sure whether anything was done to address the problem. The town may need to remove some of the existing feral cat population, because the cats can be very territorial. The feral cat program was in the City of Myrtle Beach police department budget for about five years, and was very successful. The program was discontinued, because complaints went down to almost none.

Ms. Todd said the feral cats were adept at finding shelter, and the only equipment needed for transport was a travel case and a catch pole. She was amazed how well the cats blended in the area and remained out of sight.

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55 Ms. Blair, who had been working for DHEC for 25-years, stressed that this was not a state-wide
56 DHEC program. It was a local solution to a local problem. The program was so successful that the city
57 maintenance department asked for a feral cat, and then asked for another one when the first cat died.
58

59 Mr. Childs asked if food was supplied once the cage was removed. Ms. Todd said yes, for about
60 a month. Once the cats were established in the area, the cats would scavenge. Mr. Childs asked if the
61 cat could be transferred when the problem no longer existed. Ms. Todd said the cat would just stay in the
62 area. Ms. Blair said once a cat was established in an area, it was very likely it would go back when
63 relocated. Mr. Childs asked what size area one cat could control. Ms. Todd said a couple of blocks.
64

65 Mayor Samples said Ms. Blair gave an excellent, very informative presentation. He said that
66 Myrtle Beach was much more dense than Surfside Beach. He thought Myrtle Beach had a more wide-
67 spread problem and asked if that was a fair assessment. Last time he checked, the town had received
68 three or four complaints that were limited to a very specific end of town. Ms. Blair said the assessment
69 was correct; it was a developed problem before DHEC looked into finding an answer. She commended
70 Town Council for being proactive before the situation became a bigger problem. Mayor Samples said he
71 received calls about feral cats that already live in town, which was not a new problem. He understood
72 that all animals must have food. Temporary adjustments were made to the sanitation collection schedule
73 for this season. Sanitation will be discussed during the visioning meeting with a goal to improve
74 collections on Ocean Boulevard that should reduce the rodent problem in that area. A business man in
75 town reported that in fact, rodents were a natural to Horry and Georgetown counties. Mayor Samples
76 said in his opinion the perception of the problem was very, very limited. It did not make sense for the
77 town to devote resources to cleaning up existing feral cats. Ms. Blair said those cats could be used, but
78 would need to be spayed or neutered, vaccinated against rabies, and have a wellness check. Mayor
79 Samples said and then the cats would have to be re-acclimated to a new setting. Ms. Blair said it was up
80 to Town Council to determine how to resolve the rodent problem. She was not trying to sell them a
81 program. Mayor Samples appreciated her comment. There were different views as to what the next step
82 should be. His view was that this is a trash problem, and not a rat problem.
83

84 Ms. Blair asked if the rats were only seen during the summer or year round. (** No audio for
85 unspecified time.)
86

87 Ms. Blair said there was no program that would guaranty eradication of any wild animal. Better
88 focus on trash collection would help. Rats multiply very quickly, so if the problem was not addressed, a
89 problem may present in the future. Hopefully, the town will never have the problem to the magnitude that
90 Myrtle Beach had. Cost and resources for this program would be very minimal: charges by the
91 veterinarian, who may offer services to help the town; a bag of food that at the most cost \$15; cages for
92 housing, and volunteers to put out food and water.
93

94 Mr. Magliette was glad to hear about the program's success in Myrtle Beach. His biggest
95 concern was liability. The cats would be the town's responsibility. What would happen if a cat bit or
96 scratched a tourist or small child, or damaged personal property? What would happen if the cats went
97 into a residential neighborhood and became a nuisance? Mr. Magliette had heard complaints that the
98 town has a large feral cat population. There already is a danger to birds and wildlife, because of the feral
99 cats. He would have to be convinced that the program would not create any liability for the town before
100 he supported it. The town has taken many proactive steps to help resolve the trash problem with the
101 hope that when the food source is no longer available that the population would be manageable.
102

103 Ms. Blair said that feral cats were not "friendly" cats; generally they do not want to be petted.
104 Usually, feral cats stay away from people and roam during the late evening. Ms. Blair thought the victim
105 would bear some responsibility if they were trying to pet them. She did not think that anybody could
106 guarantee that an incident would not occur. She was at this workshop to explain how the program
107 worked in Myrtle Beach, which never had any complaints about cats scratching [or biting people.] Ms.
108 Blair said that her job involves rabies testing. It is State Law that any one bitten by an animal is required
109 to report the bite and the animal must be quarantined and tested for rabies.
110

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111 Mr. Stevens knew this was done successfully as a local program in Myrtle Beach. But, DHEC
112 has an article on its website stating that DHEC recommends getting rid of all feral cats. He sees feral
113 cats all over town and did not see any sense in bringing more into town. His biggest concern was liability.
114 Ms. Blair reiterated that there was always liability and no way to eliminate it. Mr. Stevens thought the rat
115 problem was caused by the excess garbage. The fact that the town was doing a better job collecting the
116 garbage should help the problem by removing the food source. He understood that rats live everywhere,
117 but the fact was that excess garbage provided another source of food. Rats would find discarded food,
118 just as a dog or cat would find discarded fish. His point was that he saw no value in bringing in feral cats
119 when there was no documentation.

120
121 Ms. Blair disagreed with Mr. Stevens and said she was present to answer technical questions, not
122 to be berated on the ethics of the program. Mayor Samples and Mr. Stevens spoke simultaneously
123 saying that was not the intention. Mr. Stevens said he just wished there was more documentation.
124 Mayor Samples appreciated Ms. Blair's willingness and the information being provided. He did not want
125 to get into debates, and asked if there were other questions.

126
127 Ms. Mabry thanked Ms. Blair for attending and sharing the information. She took her time to help
128 the town and she appreciated it. Ms. Blair said she was happy to as she did not want a small problem to
129 become more than the town could handle. She wished the town well, and offered her assistance, if there
130 was anything more that she could do.

131
132 Mr. Stevens asked where the feral cats in Myrtle Beach were found and who paid for the cats'
133 treatment. Ms. Blair explained they were caught in the community and evaluated for the program. The
134 police department had funds in its budget to cover veterinarian costs.

135
136 Mayor Samples said the town was small, and bordered by the campground and Garden City. He
137 reiterated that he did not believe there was a real problem. As one of the town's largest realty company
138 owners said [rats] are in Georgetown; in Horry, and they always have been. The number of complaints
139 received was minimal. As a government, the town could not afford to eliminate all risks. He applauded
140 Town Council for taking actions to address the sanitation issue. As he mentioned earlier, there was still
141 more work to be done. Mayor Samples said personally that he had serious reservations about engaging
142 staff in activities that he did not believe were as productive as other town priorities. If there was a serious
143 problem, as he said for the record before, "Public health is a primary concern of ours." The steps taken
144 need to be evaluated. If the problem persists more than what the public works director described, then he
145 thought it would be appropriate to take additional action. Mayor Samples said some might say the police
146 department was already charged with too many duties. They do a great job. The town is a very safe
147 place to live, which is the police department's primary role and responsibility.

148
149 Mr. Childs thanked Ms. Blair for attending the workshop. He reiterated that this was not a DHEC
150 sponsored program. Ms. Blair attended on her own time and agreed to answer questions, but DHEC
151 would not support this program in any manner should the town choose to implement it. Mr. Childs said
152 again that he appreciated Ms. Blair and Ms. Todd attending the workshop to provide the information.

153
154 Mayor Samples said he was sure that all councilmembers shared those remarks, and thanked
155 Ms. Blair very much.

156
157 Mr. Magliette said he walks Ocean Boulevard daily. During the time since the sanitation
158 collection was addressed the amount of over-spill has reduced 95-percent. Staff was doing a good job
159 emptying the dumpsters, and putting out extra cans. He commended public works staff for doing the
160 needful things. The collection schedule was working well, and the boulevard was looking much better.

161
162 Mr. Stevens thanked Ms. Blair for attending to give information on the program. Although, he did
163 not have enough information to make a decision, it was good to hear about the program and also that the
164 public could hear the presentation. He thanked Mr. Adair for improving sanitation collection on Ocean
165 Boulevard. Raccoons and rats go into trash cans. He thanked everyone for attending, and said the
166 problem was being eliminated by better trash collection schedules. As long as trash was collected, it

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167 would help the town be cleaner. Mr. Stevens said the rats would look for other food sources and may
168 leave town.

169
170 Ms. Mabry said the town currently baits the rats. For the record she said, "I am opposed to
171 putting poison down on public property. You want to put it down in your own backyard, that's you and
172 you. But, we're responsible for our public property, and I really am opposed to putting poison down for
173 whatever animal that gets it. No guaranty, though, that it would just be a rat. Also, call your favorite
174 university. They will tell you that rats live in the dunes, if there are no houses around; if there's no trash
175 around. So that's not our only food source; is our trash. Of course, we don't need to add to it. But, the
176 fact is they do exist whether there's any human trash being thrown out or not. We do need to take good
177 care of that. But they're indigenous to this area. So we're trying to get rid of a problem that is going to
178 exist just because we are at the beach. How we do it is something that we'll all have to come together. I
179 don't think this is going to go away. I can see that it would multiply. However, you're going to have to
180 involve the county. We don't have a gated fence between 16th or Melody Lane and north Garden City.
181 There just isn't one. So we're going to have to engage the county. There's some other steps to take.
182 Hopefully, getting the education is the first step and that we can continue talking about and finding
183 solutions to this problem. Again, thank Vicki Blair. This is a great educational opportunity, and I do
184 appreciate it."

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186 Mayor Samples declared the workshop closed.

187 Prepared from audio recording and submitted by,

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191 _____
192 Debra E. Herrmann, CMC, Town Clerk

193 Approved: September 22, 2015

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196 Douglas F. Samples, Mayor

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198 _____
199 David L. Pellegrino, Mayor Pro Tempore

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199 Robert F. Childs, Town Council

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201 _____
202 Mark L. Johnson, Town Council

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201 Mary Beth Mabry, Town Council

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204 Ralph J. Magliette, Town Council

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203 Randle M. Stevens, Town Council

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207 Clerk's Note: This document constitutes summary minutes of the meeting that was digitally recorded.
208 Appointments to hear recordings may be scheduled with the town clerk, or you may bring a flash drive to
209 obtain a copy of the audio recording. In accordance with FOIA, meeting notice and the agenda were
210 distributed to local media and interested parties. The agenda was posted on the town website, the entry
211 door at Town Council Chambers, and meeting notice was also posted on the Town marquee.