



# Coachella Valley Animal Campus

## Animal Campus Commission

**City of Cathedral City**  
Councilmember Mark Carnevale  
Mayor Stan Henry  
(Alternate)

**City of Coachella**  
Councilmember Magdalena Zepeda  
Councilmember Betty Sanchez  
(Alternate)

**City of Desert Hot Springs**  
Councilmember Joe McKee

**City of Indian Wells**  
Mayor Ty Peabody  
Mayor Pro Tem Dana Reed  
(Alternate)

**City of Indio**  
Councilmember Elaine Holmes  
Jason Chan  
(Alternate)

**City of La Quinta**  
Councilmember John Pena  
Mayor Pro Tem Kristy Franklin  
(Alternate)

**City of Palm Desert**  
Frankie Riddle

**Palm Springs Animal Shelter**  
Dr. Shayda Ahkami- Shelter Director  
**Friends of Palm Springs Animal Shelter**  
Tamara Hedges-Vice President  
Ex- Officio

**City of Rancho Mirage**  
Mayor G. Dana Hobart  
**Chairman**

**County of Riverside**  
John J. Benoit, 4<sup>th</sup> District  
Patricia Cooper, Board Assistant  
**Vice-Chair**  
Marion Ashley, 5<sup>th</sup> District

**Animal Samaritans**  
Len D. Betz, President  
Ex-Officio

**County Staff**  
Carol-Ann Myers  
Executive Assistant I

**Thursday, July 9, 2015**  
**9:30 a.m.**  
**Commission Meeting**  
**CVAG**  
**73-710 Fred Waring Drive**  
**Palm Desert, CA 92260**

### 1. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

### 2. **CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

The Animal Campus Commission Meeting was called to order on Thursday, July 9, 2015 at 9:32 a.m. at the Coachella Valley Association of Governments, 73-710 Fred Waring Drive Palm Desert, CA 92260, by Vice-Chair Patricia Cooper, Board Assistant for Riverside County 4<sup>th</sup> District.

A roll call was conducted and it was determined that there was a quorum. The following were present:

#### **Members in Attendance:**

Patricia Cooper, County of Riverside  
John Pena, Councilmember, La Quinta  
Ty Peabody, Mayor, Indian Wells  
Elaine Holmes, Councilmember, Indio  
Joe McKee, Councilmember, Desert Hot Springs  
Frankie Riddle, Palm Desert  
Mark Carnevale, Councilmember, Cathedral City  
Tamara Hedges, Vice-President, Friends of Palm Springs Animal Shelter  
Dr. Shayda Ahkami, Director, Palm Springs Animal Shelter  
Fred Saunders, Animal Samaritans, Ex-Officio

#### **Others in attendance:**

Jason Chan, Sr. Management Analyst, Indio  
Earl Moss, Police Captain, Cathedral City  
Tom Snyder, Chief Operating Officer, Animal Samaritans  
Robert Miller, Director, County Animal Services  
Frank Corvino, Deputy Director, County Animal Services  
Dr. Allan Drusys, Chief Veterinarian, County Animal Services  
Carol-Ann Myers, Executive Assistant, County Animal Services

### 3. **PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

**Lisa Blodgett (La Quinta Resident/Activist):** Mrs. Blodgett expressed concerns pertaining to lack of signage advertising the shelter on the Interstate 10 freeway. Per Robert Miller, at the last meeting Animal Services reported Caltrans allowed them to place a sign on the freeway off-ramp, however that is all they were allowed to do. Animal Services is willing to put signage once approval is received. Frank Corvino stated that per Caltrans the reasoning behind not receiving signage approval is due to too many signs on the freeway. Frank Corvino stated the County would continue to work with Caltrans on the issue. Mrs. Blodgett also expressed concerns pertaining to the case of the dog "Hercules". Robert Miller indicated he will offer an update. Lastly, she would like an update on the alleged investigation pertaining to the Humane Society of The Desert.

# Coachella Valley Animal Campus

## PUBLIC COMMENTS CONTINUED:

Jaqueline Mercier-Berman (Palm Springs Resident/Activist): Mrs. Mercier-Berman asked for clarification on the protocol for members of the public being able to be added to the agenda. She stated that Paula Terifaj from Desert Hot Springs was told she could only speak during public comment. Carol-Ann Myers stated that she spoke to Ms. Terifaj prior to the meeting, and that if a commission member wishes to have her item added, they can bring it forward to be voted on by all members as an emergency agenda item. Patricia Cooper reminded Mrs. Mercier-Berman that this is the time for public comment, and that her question can be addressed at the "Finalization of Agenda" section of the agenda. Mrs. Mercier-Berman requested she be added on the agenda specific to the commission, and asked members of the commission if they have read/reviewed the mission. Mrs. Mercier-Berman stated her issue involves communication. Mrs. Mercier-Berman stated she has now received notification in writing from Robert Miller that he did meet with District Attorney Mike Hestrin, and that there is an open investigation pertaining to Humane Society of the Desert. She said however this information was not received until July 8<sup>th</sup>. Mrs. Mercier-Berman said she implored her friend/ District Attorney/ Animal Activist, Camellia Mesrobian, to contact Robert Miller; however after two weeks she received no return phone call. Mrs. Mercier-Berman stated she later received a phone call from Robert Miller, and he informed her that Mike Hestrin has assigned someone to this case. According to her this information was given out "selectively," and those who were a part of the "Care 2 Petition" did not receive this information and are thus subject to a lawsuit. She clarified that this is why she brought forward the question pertaining to the mission as it relates to transparency, because she feels there is none. Mrs. Mercier-Berman requested she be added to the agenda regarding this, and also stated that the minutes were not accurate from the last meeting and did not capture what she truly said pertaining to "no-cost" vs "low-cost" spay/neuter services through the donor Dorothy Davis.

Dr. Paula Terifaj (Desert Hot Springs Resident/Activist): Dr. Paula Terifaj would like a "yes or no" answer on whether or not there is an open/active investigation currently with the Riverside County District Attorney's office on the Humane Society of The Desert/Melinda Bustos as she alleged was reported by Robert Miller in the previous meeting. She alleged because of this information from the May meeting, she arranged a "Care 2 Petition" titled "Urge Mike Hestrin to Prosecute Melinda Bustos." There are over 850 signatures on this petition in one month. Dr. Terifaj would like correct information in order to be reassured she has reported accurate information. Mayor Peabody notified Dr. Terifaj that the commission members are not supposed to elaborate/respond on items that are discussed during public comment.

Kim Hardee (Coachella Animal Network): Mrs. Hardee thanked the County for participating in their upcoming clinic in Indio on July 25, 2015. Currently they have sterilized over 1,800 animals. Mrs. Hardee also discussed the feral cat issue in Indio, and she would like assistance from the County on possibly doing "Trap Neuter Release" (TNR) on the Perris Fair Grounds. Kittens are reportedly dying in the barn on the Perris Fair Grounds. Robert Miller deferred this situation to Dr. Allan Drusys, the county's Chief Veterinarian, as he coordinates the department's mobile spay/neuter deployments.

Karen Henkel-Willis (Cathedral City resident): Mrs. Willis expressed concern within her community on how to receive help for those who do not have access to the internet. Mrs. Willis also spoke of the influx of small breed stray dogs within her neighborhood, and lack of

care expressed by owners once they are identified. Mrs. Willis would appreciate any education/assistance provided to her community, because she feels there is a lack of communication on how to receive help for animal related issues.

Terence Davis (Loving All Animals): Mr. Davis introduced himself; he serves as a representative of Loving All Animals.

5. **FINALIZATION OF AGENDA:** Councilman McKee motioned to have Jacqueline Mercier-Berman added to the agenda, with Councilwoman Holmes seconding the motion. Councilman Pena and Mayor Peabody requested clarification on the item to be discussed. Mrs. Mercier-Berman stated her item pertains to the mission of the commission, and why everyone is here: for the betterment of the animals. She also indicated concerns that the minutes and statements made in the last meeting were not accurately reported. Lastly, she requested to discuss communication. Councilman Pena reiterated that the topic requesting to be discussed was the mission statement of the commission. Mrs. Mercier-Berman stated the topic is to pass out a letter that was drafted to the commission from the donor Dorothy Davis. Robert Miller addressed the concerns of the accuracy of the minutes, indicating that an audio recording is available from the last meeting should anyone have questions pertaining to the May minutes. Mrs. Mercier-Berman then clarified that the item to be added is regarding a lack of returned emails/phone calls for two months by animal control, transparency and the Brown Act. The members deliberated on the item in question, and it was determined that Mrs. Mercier-Berman can be added onto the agenda as an emergency item, only as it relates to Mrs. Dorothy Davis' donation towards no-cost spay/neuter services in the Coachella Valley. m/s Peabody/Riddle all members were in favor of having this added, the motion carried.

6. **ANIMAL CAMPUS COMMISSION MEMBERS AND DIRECTOR COMMENTS:**

Councilman McKee discussed that one of the members of the "Safety Commission" has received a second citation notice for no dog license. He was concerned that he would incur a fine. Additionally, Councilman McKee spoke on an issue with renters receiving citations within Desert Hot Springs, and that information from Animal Control was not being disseminated to both the renter and the landlord. He gave an example of a constituent who reached out to him for assistance. Additional concerns are regarding information not being consistent in Animal Control's computer system. Robert Miller stated that unfortunately as a homeowner it is their "hardship" to be responsible for being out of compliance, much like an outstanding utility bill. Councilman McKee said this is becoming an issue in his city as homeowners are now changing their policy as it pertains to allowing their tenants to own animals, due to the liability of the citations. Robert Miller expressed his concerned as well. Dr. Allan Drusys indicated this example was a training issue, is being addressed with staff, and will be reviewed and corrected. Councilman McKee is concerned as he sees it is a recurring excuse – as far as he is concerned, it is a management issue.

Councilman Pena discussed the need for signage warning people of the dangers of leaving animals in cars during the heat. The Mayor of La Quinta received an email from a concerned member of the public about the lack of this type of signage. Deputy Director Frank Corvino said that the department currently doesn't a news release, and has an abundance of information as it pertains to this topic that can be sent. Robert Miller said it would be nice for business owners to receive free signage. Patricia Cooper will follow-up with the Supervisor's office to see if they can offer any assistance.

Councilwoman Holmes discussed a newspaper article relating to animals being left in hot cars. Councilwoman Holmes discussed the issues with Pit-Bull breeds in her community. Tom Snyder and Fred Saunders from Animal Samaritans indicated they currently have a grant for spay/neuter for Pit-bull breeds specific to the East Valley.

7. **CORRESPONDENCE:** None

8. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** Councilwoman Holmes stated there are two concerned citizens who believe the minutes are not accurate. She suggested we address the issue amongst the members in order to either change or approve the minutes. Robert Miller clarified this objection of the minutes pertains to statements he made regarding the Humane Society of The Desert. The audio from the last meeting is available, should the commission wish to listen and then determine whether to approve or change the language in the May minutes. Patricia Cooper asked for clarification on the statement in questions. In the last meeting, it is alleged Robert Miller indicated the District Attorney's office had a current, open investigation on the Humane Society of The Desert. Robert Miller indicated that is incorrect – the audio reflects he stated he could not comment on the topic when asked by Mayor Peabody in the May meeting. It was decided that the minutes were accurate and approved as submitted. m/s Peabody/Cooper

9. **COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES:**

Robert Miller- Director: Animal Action League is applying for a grant through PetSmart Charities; Animal Services has provided them with a letter of support. The grant will bring funds to the Desert Hot Springs community to provide free spay/neutering services. The department is working with the Executive Office to start advertising Pets of The Week at the weekly Board of Supervisors meetings. The "Hercules" incident is still being investigated by the County's Human Resources department. Rob will report any information to the commission and the public once the investigation is complete as he guaranteed previously. The department will be having two representatives of San Antonio Animal Care Services visiting the Coachella Valley Animal Campus on July 22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> to provide consulting services at no charge to the department. Lori Kirshner from Advancing the Interest of Animals will be hosting a Town Hall Meeting on July 22<sup>nd</sup> at the Palm Springs Convention Center. The purpose of the Town Hall meeting is for the consultants and the department to hear concerns from residents regarding Animal Services' current programs.

The Board of Supervisors approved \$3.6 million be added to the department's budget. Rob thanked the commission for their support. This addition to the budget will allow the department to operate without disruption of programs, as well as deploy new technology for the Animal Control Officers. The new technology will include GPS tracking of Officers to improve efficiency when dispatching calls, and serve as a safety tool in emergency situations. The County will continue to use "AVID" microchips. AVID has committed to donating 80 universal scanners. Robert Miller addressed the concern surrounding the Humane Society of The Desert. He clarified that he is a mandated reporter, and therefore any information he receives he is required to forward to the appropriate people. Robert Miller has met with the District Attorney Mike Hestrin, as well as Vicki Hightower, Chief Deputy District Attorney, however he cannot relay the content of the meeting or the outcome. Robert Miller provided Mrs. Hightower's contact information should anyone have questions or additional information, as the issue is out of his purview. Robert Miller stated it's important for everyone to focus on the end goal and finding a resolution in this situation and indicated he will not be reporting on this topic in any future meetings.

Frank Corvino- Deputy Director (case updates): The person responsible for striking a stray dog to death with a shovel in Whitewater has been arrested, and is being charged with felony animal cruelty. The owner who tied a rubber band around his dog's snout has served 1 day in jail, will have 3 years of probation and mandatory counseling, and cannot own an animal for 5 years. The department is participating in dog training with participants from the Indio Youth Detention Center. There are currently 4 dogs in the program. The youth must be in

good behavioral standing in order to participate. The last group to participate found all of the dogs permanent homes.

Euthanasia Reduction Plan (Frank Corvino): Deputy Director Frank Corvino presented a power point presentation that discusses promotions, programs, and goals for the department.

Dr. Allan Drusys- Chief Veterinarian (Data Audit): Dr. Drusys shared with the commission a spreadsheet as a result of the Data Audit that was requested at the last meeting. A random audit of euthanasia statistics was performed during the period of 9 days in 2014. Rob Miller clarified that this audit was a result of public comment in the last meeting. Dr. Drusys stated that the commission can review the spreadsheet and consult with Animal Services should they have any questions.

- 10. ANIMAL SAMARITANS:** Tom Snyder complemented all of the promotions Animal Services is currently working on. To date, the Adoption Alliance Program has rescued 1,044 dogs. The new facility in Indio is 3,000 square feet. There is currently discussion of expanding into the 1500 square foot facility next door. The opening of the new facility will take about 20% of customers from their facility in the Coachella Valley.

**Fred Saunders (CEO):** Fred Saunders noted the importance of education and cooperation in communities. Mr. Saunders attended the County Board of Supervisor's meeting in support of Animal Services, as well as drafted a letter that was sent to the Board. Mr. Saunders complemented Rob Miller on his budget presentation. Animal Samaritans has a spay/neuter program currently for pit-bull and pit-bull mixes in the East Valley. They currently have a new "TNR" program.

- 11. PALM SPRINGS ANIMAL SHELTER:** Dr. Shayda Ahkami, shelter Director, and Tamara Hedges, Vice President of "Friends of the Palm Springs Animal Shelter", presented a power point presentation that summarized the shelter's program, mission, and goals.

**12. DONATION FOR FREE SPAY/NEUTER SERVICES :**

Jacqueline Mercier- Berman: Mrs. Mercier-Berman serves as the durable power of attorney and executor to Dorothy Davis. Animal Samaritans serves as a beneficiary of Mrs. Davis' trust. In reference to the May minutes, Mrs. Mercier-Berman clarified she never said "low-cost" – Mrs. Davis' donations were strictly for no-cost spay/neuter services. Mrs. Mercier-Berman stated now the question is how quickly can no-cost spay/neuter events can be arranged. This was previously done when "Lucy Pet Foundation" was brought in and worked in conjunction with the County to provide no-cost services to residents. For the event, Mrs. Davis donated \$25,000, Mrs. Mercier-Berman donated \$5,000, and Attorney Wally Clark donated \$5,000 to the Lucy Pet Foundation. The criteria for the donation is Mrs. Davis would like to know within two weeks how the donated money was allocated and what was accomplished. It was decided that Councilwoman Holmes and Mrs. Mercier-Berman would work together in order to determine how to go about coordinating an event for no-cost spay/neutering services.

**13. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The next meeting is scheduled for September 10, 2015 at 9:30AM at CVAC: 72-050 Pet Land Place Thousand Palms, CA 92276

**14. ADJOURNMENT**

Vice-Chair Patricia Cooper adjourned the meeting at 11:28 a.m.