

Animal shelter on the horizon

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Hamden's dogs, cats and animal advocates may finally see the beginnings of an animal shelter within the year. While some people may think that isn't quick enough, town officials and residents who are working toward a speedy resolution believe they are doing what they can to make the shelter a reality.

Design work has already been done, according to Delores Giannini of the Hamden Happy Tails Foundation and a driving force behind the project. Still needed are planning & zoning and wetlands approvals for the proposed site on the corner of Shepherd Avenue and Rockytop Road.

Meanwhile, the town approved \$55,000 for feasibility testing to determine whether the proposal meets all the requirements, Giannini said.

Funding for the shelter has been one of the biggest hurdles. The town applied for a state bond, but it did not come through, Giannini said.

"We are actively encouraging the town to look into grants from the state so that we can get this much-needed service off the ground," she said.

The mayor urged her to work with the town planner to set a schedule for what needs to be done. Once the approvals are granted, town officials can make more concrete plans.

Conservatively, it will require a six to nine month process, Giannini said.

The problems at hand

With no shelter to accommodate the town's needs, Hamden animal control occupies space at the North Haven Animal Shelter. That relationship, as helpful as it has been to the town, has not solved all the issues the animal control department and local independent animal rescue organizations face.

"One of our biggest obstacles is that North Haven does not allow volunteers," said Giannini. "I have so many people who are anxious to volunteer to help these animals but can't."

The Happy Tails foundation is working in partnerships with **Animal** Control Officer Chris Smith to get the dogs that go to the North Haven **shelter** adopted, she said. The **Hamden Animal Shelter** now has a Web site, as well as a spot on Petfinders.com which anyone who would like to adopt an **animal** can visit.

"We hope these steps will reduce the need for euthanizations," said Giannini.

With regard to feral cats, there is no easy solution. "Even if we had a **shelter**," she said, "you can't bring ferals into a place with other domesticated ones. Neuter/spay and release is the best solution for right now."

Area organizations like the New Haven Cat Project and Halfway Home Rescue help residents with catching, fixing and releasing ferals. But these organizations and others like them are run by volunteers and need funds to keep their operations running.

The town **animal** control department does not have a specific policy nor facility to deal with feral cats.

"We want to open a meeting in the next couple months," said Giannini, "with the public, to let them in on what we've been doing, so that when we get the **shelter** going, we can hit the ground running."