

Hamden, No. Haven mull regional animal shelter

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When it comes to building an animal shelter, it seems like Hamden had been barking up the wrong tree, but now the mayor is working on the possibility of a regional shelter with North Haven.

Mayor Scott D. Jackson and North Haven First Selectman Michael J. Freda let the cat out of the bag last week when they gave state of the town addresses to the Hamden-North Haven League of Women Voters in the North Haven Library community room.

Freda and Jackson are looking at sites for a possible animal shelter.

"We're looking at this to perhaps create greater efficiencies and perhaps become more productive," Freda said later.

Jackson said he's talked to state Rep. J. Brendan Sharkey, D-Hamden, and the new House majority leader, about grant opportunities for the regional project.

"It's less expensive for taxpayers of both towns to do a consolidated facility," Jackson said. Hamden had some money from the state set aside for an animal shelter, but the money was site specific to town-owned land on Rocky Top Road. The land was deemed unsuitable about three years ago.

Several other sites have been looked at, but nothing has worked out, according to Dolores Giannini, president of the Hamden Happy Tails Foundation, which has been raising money for Hamden shelter programs and animal medical needs for eight years.

"The town is responsible for the bricks and mortar. Once we have a site, the foundation will do a drive to get funds for the furnishings, fixtures and equipment.

Obviously, if it's going to be a regional shelter, we'll have to tweak this a bit.

The facility they have in mind will certainly accommodate two towns," said Giannini.

Hamden had a small shelter at the former Hamden landfill about 60 years ago, and then a shelter was housed at a groomer's facility.

Following that, Hamden's dogs were housed at the Merryfield Animal Hospital.

For about eight years, Hamden strays have been housed at the North Haven Animal Shelter on Universal Drive through a rental agreement.

The North Haven facility, with a dozen kennels, is too small for both towns most of the time, Giannini said.

"According to the agreement, we have access to the rental of six kennels, and we are regularly over six. When that happens, Hamden can use the other kennels as long as North Haven doesn't need them.

When the kennels are full, Hamden has to bring its other strays to other facilities.

"We are in desperate straits in this town," she said, adding that dogs and cats are becoming victims of the economy.

For example, her group last week adopted a dog whose owner could no longer keep him. Happy Tails is partnering with Save Animals From Extinction for medical and neutering costs, she said.

"We as volunteers are doing more than what is normally done in time and money. We're running ourselves ragged," she said. During their addresses, Jackson and Freda talked about the challenges facing their respective communities, when it comes to finances, operations, the miles of roads and sidewalks that need to be paved and repaired, to environmental issues, to the high cost of insurance for town employees and increasing electricity costs.

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