

Regional animal shelter back on table in Hamden

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HAMDEN -- A regional **animal shelter** for the towns of **Hamden** and North Haven may soon again be on the table after some members of the **Hamden** Legislative Council objected when the funding was left out of that town's proposed six-year capital plan.

The capital budget is an outline of what the town is going to spend on larger, one-time costs that usually involve infrastructure and equipment. It does not approve any actual spending — each project still must individually go before the council for approval — but provides an outline of what major expenses the town plans to undertake in the next six years.

Council President James Pascarella submitted the plan to the council when he was acting mayor, a position he assumed after former Mayor Scott Jackson resigned in April to take a job in Gov. Dannel Malloy's administration. Pascarella led the town until a special election was held May 28, when Mayor Curt Balzano Leng was elected to the town's top spot.

Pascarella's plan didn't include funds for the construction of an **animal shelter**, which several council members said they wanted to see included.

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For years, plans have been in the works for a regional **animal shelter** with the town of North Haven, from which **Hamden** leases kennel space. It is not only a good idea but could lead the way statewide for such regionalization, said North Haven First Selectman Michael Freda.

Hamden leases seven kennels at the **shelter**, he said, and space is tight for both towns there, especially with the uptick in dogs coming through the **shelter**. The number of dogs, especially adult dogs, being given up by their

owners is increasing, he said, possibly because owners can't afford the medical care the dogs may need.

"A significant number of pets are being abandoned," said Freda, an **animal** lover himself and chairman of the state Humane Treatment of Animals Task Force. Just recently, a young pit bull mix was abandoned at the **shelter**, chained to a fence overnight. "I visited the dog and he is really suffering from a lot of stress from being abandoned and in a kennel," he said. But with **animal** control officers working with him, he is coming around, Freda said. "Now we are seeing the dog responding to being walked and (petted) and people showing him affection," Freda said, which illustrates the importance of having sufficient space.

"We need more space — we know that," he said. While he hasn't had any discussions about a regional **shelter** with **Hamden** officials in a while, it's still something he supports, Freda said. "I'm definitely open to that," he said. "There are a lot of discussions going on at the state level about regional shelters — multiple towns sharing shelters," he said. "We are already in a collaborative relationship with **Hamden** and it would be a benefit to both of us to have a larger **shelter** to have a greater capacity to intake animals."

Leng said he will submit his own proposed capital plan to the council that includes funding for the **shelter**.

"I've put in a request for state grant assistance with (state House) Speaker (Brendan) Sharkey's office and we recommend funding acquisition costs in the capital bond request, which should go before the council the first Monday in July," Leng said.

"If it is something that can be funded through bonding, it would have minimal impact," Freda said. "I don't know why anyone would not want to consider that."

Councilman-at-Large Betty Wetmore questioned why there was a proposal for a bookmobile and a library van when the town already has three libraries — the main Miller Memorial Library and branches in Spring Glen and Whitneyville — while there was nothing in the plan for a long-awaited **animal shelter**.

"We already have three libraries," she said. "Why would we need a bookmobile?"

Councilman Michael Colaciacovo said he wanted to see a line in the plan for the shelter, even if it wasn't yet known how much it would cost. He made a motion to add an animal shelter line item of \$700,000, which was approved, as was a motion from Wetmore to remove the library items. But ultimately, because there was not enough information available on a number of items, including the animal shelter, the council voted to table approving the plan.

He's also considering whether to recommend funding for the bookmobile and the library van, Leng said.

"I am preparing for submission to the Legislative Council an updated, recommended six-year plan, as well as requests for the fiscal year 2016 capital improvement program funding," Leng said. "This package will contain many important projects, equipment and school repairs."

Some of the projects that will be included are for police, fire and Public Works vehicles, he said, as well as equipment focusing on public safety. It also will include funding for an animal shelter, he said, as well as the funding for the renovation of West Woods and Shepherd Glen schools, he said. This week the Board of Education approved an initial \$3.9 million for the projects that will go toward the design costs.

Another project that will be included is the funds to move Central Office to the Government Center, Leng said, "which will create very real cost savings and additional opportunities (for town and school officials) to collaborate."