

Hamden, North Haven working together on animal shelter proposal

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NORTH HAVEN -- The North Haven Animal Shelter is outdated and in desperate need of a makeover. There is no animal shelter in Hamden, so for decades the town has leased space, first at a veterinary hospital and now at area animal shelters, predominantly North Haven's.

But talks finally are underway on a proposal to build a regional animal shelter for the two towns, a project that has been discussed for years but never acted upon.

North Haven First Selectman Michael Freda recently met with Hamden Police Chief Thomas Wydra to begin discussions of what the regional shelter would look like. It hasn't been determined where the shelter would be located, but it would be central to both towns, Freda said.

"We have an outstanding working relationship with Hamden," Freda said. "All across the state, what we have found is that when municipalities need to upgrade their infrastructure, whether it be roads or municipal buildings, and not let the infrastructure decay, sometimes one of the last things to be upgraded is the animal shelters. As an animal lover, I'm very sensitive to the fact that shelters across the state at the municipal level are outdated and perhaps do not offer the best environment for a dog or a cat."

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Hamden Mayor Curt Balzano Leng said his town "is thrilled to be proactively working with our neighbors in North Haven to move forward on our much-needed animal shelter project as a regional effort."

"Working together will allow for cost savings to both of our communities, with capital costs and also reduced annual operational costs," Leng said.

Leng said he has appointed Wydra and Economic Development Director Dale Kroop to lead the effort on Hamden's behalf. "Together, working with our friend First Selectman Freda, I know that their collective levels of experience,

enthusiasm and dedication to this project will bring results," Leng said.

Hamden last year included \$400,000 in its capital budget to go toward a shelter.

"We are also seeking grant funding for this project," Leng said.

While the state has offered municipalities cash incentives to regionalize operations, animal shelters are not among those eligible for state funding, Freda said.

Animal welfare isn't a new cause for Freda.

Last year, when the state legislature formed the Humane Treatment of Animals Task Force to investigate reforms at municipal animal shelters, Freda was co-chairman of the task force, which came up with a list of recommendations on a variety of topics. But during the contentious budget season, the legislature failed to act on the recommendations and the task force's authority expired.

"We had total support in the Senate, and we were supposed to be called in the House on May 5, but we didn't get called for a vote," Freda said.

"Technically, we were ratified by the Senate but needed a vote in both the Senate and the House."

But Freda's not giving up, he said. He has assembled many of the original task force members, minus the representatives from the state Department of Agriculture and judicial branch, and last week held their first meeting. The task force will meet monthly until January, he said, when he hopes the legislature will renew its status as a state task force and take up its recommendations.

"We had our first task force meeting Friday," Freda said. "We are now a non-state-designated task force, so our goal is to reorganize. Our primary goal will be to get recommissioned by the state as a state task force to continue some of the work we had started.

"We will continue to look at mandatory spay/neuter," Freda said. "We see a great opportunity to help foster volunteer programs at the municipal level, so it would be a recommendation to each municipality, though it would be an optional thing.

"We are working on and have finalized a volunteer program, and it is something that can be very beneficial to not only (animal control officers), but also the quality of life of the animals that are in the shelter because it allows them to connect with people," he said.

But a top priority is lowering the number of animals that are euthanized because homes aren't found for them, he said.

"We are looking to examine state laws on euthanasia to help lessen the rates of euthanasia across the state," he said. "One key ingredient to that is to find a forever and loving home for the animals that are currently in the shelters."

He points to success stories in his own family — his brother adopted a dog from Milford Animal Control, and it benefited his brother as much as the dog, Freda said. The task force wants to make sure that every dog in a shelter has that opportunity to find a forever home, he said.

"We have a lot that we can do to promote animal welfare," he said. "Our goal is to get recommissioned, come up with a list of recommendations for them to look at, and ultimately those recommendations would have to be voted on by the House and the senate."

Other task force members include West Haven Mayor Ed O'Brien; Mark Bailey, chairman of the New Haven Animal Welfare Commission; Sgt. Paula Keller, who oversees the New Britain/Berlin Animal Shelter; and Paula Poplawski, chairwoman of the Commission of New Britain Animal Welfare.

Friday's meeting was a reorganizing meeting, Freda said.

"Our previous task force had two state offices as part of it — agriculture and the judicial branch," he said. "But because now we're technically not a state task force, two members of the previous task force — Cynthia Theron with the judicial branch and Raymond Connors, a supervisor at the Department of Agriculture, may not be able to be regular members until we can get recommissioned by the state in the next legislative session. I'm left with those two offices not being part of these task force meetings. But should we get recommissioned, the Department of Agriculture would be a huge part of our task force in the future, and also the state judicial branch, with representatives from both those state departments."

Caption:

North Haven **Animal** Control Officer Dave Carney, left, and Assistant **Animal** Control Officer Chrystal Rashba, are seen with a well-behaved 1½-year-old female pit/boxer mix Friday who they describe as sweet, gentle, loving and can understand some commands. “Somebody obviously put some time in her. She will follow you around wherever you go,” said Carney. The dog is available for adoption at the North Haven **Animal Shelter** on Universal Drive in North Haven. Peter Hvizdak — New Haven Register

The North Haven **Animal Shelter** on Universal Drive. Peter Hvizdak — New Haven Register

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