

North Haven's Freda still bullish on animal task force

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NORTH HAVEN -- First Selectman Michael Freda doesn't like to give up, so when the state House of Representatives failed to act on reauthorizing his **Animal Shelter** Task Force, Freda decided to keep going anyway on the reforms he says are needed to improve outcomes for stray animals in Connecticut.

Last year, Freda was named to co-chair the Humane Treatment of Animals Task Force with Northeast Council of Governments **Animal** Control Officer Diane Collette. The task force met monthly and formulated recommendations that included a requirement that dogs be spayed or neutered before being adopted out of any municipal **shelter**.

The state Senate passed the bill, but it stalled in the House, effectively killing both the hope of reform and the task force itself.

"Our state task force was up for recommissioning during this legislative session and through the efforts of Sen. Martin Looney, Sen. Len Fasano and Sen. Ted Kennedy — they were the driving factors — a bill was written which had an amendment in it to recommission our task force for another 18 months to work on **animal** welfare issues and municipal **shelter** issues and opportunities," Freda said.

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The bill got mired in the state's budget problems and the House failed to act on the task force bill.

"Due to the very hectic nature of what was happening in the House of Representatives, even though our bill was on the House call list and go list, it did not get called for a vote, and what that meant was we are officially not recommissioned," Freda said. But even though it's not now officially recognized by the state, the task force's work will continue, he said.

"What we will be doing is continuing the task force as a task force

on animal welfare without the designation of it being a state task force," he said. He has asked all of the members to continue meeting for six months beginning in July through December, he said. Because it won't be an official state task force, they won't be able to use the facilities in Hartford, he said, but will be meeting in the various municipalities.

"We will work on a couple of initiatives and then we will present those initiatives to the Senate or the House to try to create a bill on those initiatives," he said. One of those will be for the task force to be officially recommissioned starting next year, he said.

The recommendations the task force endorsed included a movement to reduce euthanasia rates and mandatory spay neuter program, Freda said. "However, the work we did on those two issues did not get memorialized in any legislation," he said. "We would continue to push for that."

Another important issue is regionalization, Freda said. "I really think the broad opportunity is the regionalized format for shelters," he said. "One thing I would like to see us work on is opportunities to regionalize these shelters and then work on improving the conditions of the shelters through some sort of infrastructure upgrade package."

Hamden and North Haven are a good example of a good regional collaboration, he said. Hamden has no shelter of its own and rents space at areas shelters, predominantly in North Haven. The partnership has worked out well but is constrained by the size of North Haven's shelter, he said. "Our shelter really is small and it certainly could be expanded based upon the number of animals that could go into the shelter," he said. "I do see opportunities throughout the state - there are those municipalities that don't even have shelters, and many municipalities whose shelters have declined in terms of the quality."

With the budget pressures municipalities face, oftentimes it's items like the animal shelter that get left behind, he said.

"What happens sometimes in municipal government is there is the need for infrastructure upgrades — very important upgrades, whether they be school construction, roads being paved, municipal buildings that need to be upgraded — and sometimes what gets lost in the shuffle is municipal shelters that need a degree of upgrading.

"I'd like to address how we can do this."