

February 10, 2016

To the Honorable Mayor and City Council
City of Norman

Mayor Rosenthal,

I am writing this letter for myself and my wife, Alicia, as private citizens in the City of Norman. I would like to emphasize that my following comments are not associated with or on behalf of my employment with the City of Norman or my position at the Norman Police Department. Alicia and I are writing this letter to request a review and consideration to place a plaque on the cat porch at the Norman Animal Welfare Center in compliance with the *City of Norman, Citizen Recognition Policy*. This feature was added into the construction project and other items were purchased and fully paid for with donated funds in memory of our daughter, Sara.

Our daughter Sara was murdered on June 27, 2013, in a domestic violence incident. She was only 23 years old, but she had a full life during that time and touched the hearts in a lot of peoples' lives. Sara also had a very large spot in her heart for animals. She had two pets at home and she treated them like her children. She had a Chihuahua named Cora and a Tabby cat named Henry. She cared for them and pampered them to a level that any animal would be completely pleased. Alicia and I are now caring for Sara's orphaned pets and will continue to treat them with the same special care and love that she dedicated to them. I will share a little background about Sara's love for animals to help support our request to display a plaque on the cat porch at the Norman Animal Welfare Center.

From the earliest moments, I can recall how Sara displayed her compassion for animals when she was just a little girl. She was helping Alicia in the yard, but they could not fill the bird feeder because we were out of bird seed. Sara looked up with her big baby eyes drooping so sadly and said "But the little birdies are starving." Of course, we went out and got a bag of bird seed. More recently, when she was visiting a friend at a local apartment complex she found a goose at the complex pond with a wing that was missing. It appeared to have been attacked by a dog. She caught the goose and drove it to Wild Care in Noble to see if they could save its life. Sara called back on several occasions and checked on the condition of the goose.

If Sara saw an unattended dog or cat along the road, she would want to stop and try to get it. She would say it needed food or water and wanted to help it. Even if you pointed out to her that the pet had a collar on, she would reply that it may be lost and needed help finding its way home. Fortunately, Sara knew she could not take in and care for every dog or cat she saw, but she would make sure we knew she wanted to help them. Otherwise, I think our house would have been well over the pet limit.

Sara loved animals so much that she got a job and worked at the Westwood Veterinary Hospital. She felt this was one of the greatest jobs she had because she got to work with animals and help treat the sick or injured animals. She worked at this job while she obtained her training in phlebotomy. Prior to her death, she had begun working for Norman Regional Hospital as part of the lab services area, expanding her aspiration of helping others to helping care for people too. She especially like working with the small children who had to have blood drawn. She had a unique calming attitude which eased their stress.

Sara was always loving and caring for others and especially for animals. She was a member of Human Society and PETA. She wanted to volunteer at the Norman Welfare Center, but I joked with her and told her I had put her name on the "Do Not Adopt" list because we already had the maximum number of pets allowed. Mainly, I was afraid that some puppies or kittens would accidentally fall into her pocket and end up at the house.

Sara was a caring person who showed her overwhelming care for others, even in her last hours of life. On the day she was murdered, she had gone to spend the night with a co-worker that she worked with in the lab at Norman Regional Hospital because they both had an 8 a.m. shift the next day. That evening, for some reason the co-worker's boyfriend became enraged and uncontrollable. He forced the two girls onto their knees in the kitchen floor and began to beat them with his fists and the butt of a shotgun. The co-worker testified at the murder's trial about Sara's selfless actions. She testified about how Sara, more than once, leaned over in front of her to block his attacks and pleaded for him to stop beating her friend. As they fled into a spare bedroom to try to seek safety, Sara's friend was knocked out from a blow to her head that caused a skull fracture and Sara was shot in the head and killed.

Alicia and I did not want Sara to simply be remembered as "that young girl that was murdered". We wanted her to be remembered for her love and caring for others, and especially for animals. Having worked closely with the development of the design for the renovation of the Norman Animal Welfare Center I have talked about the project at home on many occasions. When the construction bids came in higher than expected, features had to be deleted from the project to save costs and to be able to obtain a construction contract. One item that was cut from the project was a feature that Sara loved and had commented many times about how nice it would be. The feature was a cat porch or sunroom by the front doors where the cats could go into and play or just lay in the sun. Sara thought that area would be great for the cats to get fresh air and sunshine and would allow the cats to be seen by everyone coming into the center and would increase their chances for placement into a new forever home.

As a tribute to Sara and as a way to keep her love and caring for animals on-going, Alicia and I decided to obtain the funds and ensure that the cat porch part of the project can be added back into the building design. The City of Norman graciously allowed donations to be made directly to the Norman Animal Welfare Center in Sara's name. It was always understood that all the donated funds collected in Sara's name would be used at the Norman Animal Welfare Center to improve the quality of care for the animals at the center while they were waiting for new forever homes.

In the beginning, the cat porch was the goal we wanted to accomplish. It was estimated that the total cost for the cat porch would be about \$9,000 to add the feature back into the project. There were two components needed for this concept to work. The first would be the installation of the awning over the front entry doors to the shelter, which also serves as the roof for the cat porch. The second is the actual construction of the concrete flooring and a screened enclosure area for the cats to use.

Donations began to come in and were tracked to ensure that all the funds would be utilized for the cat porch. Many friends, family members and citizens asked us what they could do to help honor Sara. We simply asked that they assist with the project because of how much she loved animals. It was obvious that any items funded from the donations would be added improvements in the renovation of the Norman Animal Welfare Center, would help improve adoptions and would assist in dogs and cats finding that perfect forever homes. Overall the project would benefit the entire City of Norman for many years to come.

The donations received exceeded our initial goal. More than \$21,000 was donated to the Norman Animal Welfare Center for Sara. We were able to fund the full cost of the cat porch, upgrade both dog and cat kennels, and purchase cat furniture for the multi-cat rooms. On May 13, 2014, the Council approved the appropriation of the donated funds which had been made in Sara's name specifically for the addition of the cat porch to the construction project, but also the balance of the funds to be used to purchase other items for the center. I have attached a copy of Change Order #5, where the funds for the cat porch were appropriated. The balance of the funds were also appropriated for use on additional items. The Norman Animal Welfare Center was able to upgrade ALL the dog and cat kennels in the adoption area from wire mesh fronts and changed them to glass fronts. This change makes the kennels more pleasing to look at, makes it easier to see the animals inside, and helps with the marketing of the animal when people are visiting the center seeking an animal to adopt. (Photos of the modified kennels attached.) In addition, there was enough funds to purchase "cat furniture" to go into the open area rooms for displaying adoptable cats. Those rooms are large rooms in which 5-6 cats can be free roaming inside the room and they can play or rest on the fixtures. People seeking to adopt a cat can go into the room and interact with the cats. (Photos attached.)

We have had a plaque made and inscribed to give a snapshot overview of Sara's love for animals and about how and why the cat porch feature was added into the construction project. (Photo attached.) We are requesting approval to place the plaque on the outside screen of the cat porch so it will be visible to those patrons coming to the Norman Animal Welfare Center. The language in the plaque is not just about Sara, but also includes the recognition to all of those who made a donation and who shared Sara's love for the animals at the center.


In accordance with the *City of Norman's Citizen Recognition Policy* we believe that the plaque should be allowed and request approval for the placement of the plaque. The plaque would not be to name the building, but would only be to recognize and commonly referred to as the "cat porch" for which donations were specifically accepted, with the acknowledgement of the City. On the plaque, we have referenced the 6'x14' cat porch area as "Sara's Solarium" since it is a place where the cats can go outside and enjoy the sun light. In the City's Citizen Recognition Policy, under the section for *Contribution Dedication Guidelines*, line 2-B clearly states that dedication opportunities may be extended for projects not budgeted and for which other funding is not designated and a 100% contribution is made in order for the project to be implemented. As previously stated, this portion of the building design and construction had been fully removed from the project in steps to save building costs so that a contract could be obtained for the construction of the remainder of the building. There were no plans for the City of Norman to seek additional funds to have this feature in the construction or to be added to the building in the future. In fact, had the area not been constructed as the building was constructed, the concrete slab floor, awning and access door into the area would not have been present to add the feature at a later time.

In addition, line 3 of the policy allows for public recognition for minor items such as benches, trees, refuse cans, flag poles, fountains or other similar items. The policy states that those items are not subject to the guidelines and policies in the *City of Norman's Citizen Recognition Policy*. This small area, even though attached to the building, would be no more intrusive than a flag pole or a fountain. If viewed as such, then formal approval is not needed to place the plaque on the solarium's screen.

In addition, the plaque reflects the worst tragedy that can happen in a domestic violence situation, a senseless murder. Domestic violence and its prevention is a topic that the City of Norman and many

other community organizations have strived to prevent. The City of Norman has annually supported awareness of domestic violence issues in the form of a Resolution proclaiming the month of October as Domestic Abuse Awareness Month. If approved, the plaque would be a permanent reminder to all who see it about the critical issues associated with domestic abuse.

Alicia and I express our deepest and sincere thank you for your consideration of this request. If approved, the plaque would provide a loving legacy for Sara and would show her overwhelming desire to help others and the dedicated love that she had for animals and also the support of family, friends and Norman citizens who supported the project through their generous donations.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Maisano". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jim" being more prominent than the last name "Maisano".

Jim and Alicia Maisano

1527 Charles Street
Norman, OK
Ward 8

Attachments: Plaque requested to be displayed
Cat room furniture purchased 1
Cat room furniture purchased 2
Cat room furniture purchased 3
Alicia with cat on cat room furniture
Cat kennels, with upgraded glass fronts
Dog kennels, with upgraded glass fronts
Text Copy R-1314-127
Page 4, Citizen Recognition Policy