

CITY COUNCIL CONFERENCE MINUTES

May 26, 2020

The City Council of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in a virtual conference at 5:30 p.m. hosted in the Municipal Building Council Chambers on the 26th day of May, 2020, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted at the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray 48 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT:	Councilmembers Bierman, Carter, Hall, Holman, Petrone, Scanlon, Scott, Wilson, Mayor Clark
ABSENT:	None

Item 1, being:

DISCUSSION REGARDING AN AGREEMENT WITH THE OKLAHOMA HUMANE SOCIETY TO PROVIDE SHELTER SERVICES FOR THE CITY OF NORMAN ANIMAL WELFARE CENTER.

Mr. Mark Bechtel, Animal Welfare Center Manager, said the mission of Norman Animal Welfare is to encourage responsible pet ownership by promoting and protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the residents and pets of Norman through education, enforcement, and community partnership. He quoted Brent Toellner, Senior Director of National Programs for Best Friends Animal Society, as stating, "With more community support, this means shelters can evolve into something more akin to a community resource hub and social service provider and leave the notion of "traditional shelters" behind for good."

Mr. Bechtel highlighted benefits of partnering with the Oklahoma Humane Society (Society) that include a Foster Program; Volunteer Program; Behavioral Assessment Program; Rescue Program; Special Events and Community Education; Marketing, Public Relations, Social Media; Transport Program; Community Cat Program; Neonate Program; Adoption Program; and a Board of Directors for governance, mission longevity, and stringent financial management while maintaining community engagement.

A proposed agreement with the Society would include a one-year contract that can be cancelled by either party with 180-day written notice. He said the Society, as an independent contractor, would be responsible for employing personnel and would furnish a list of all employees, including title, and job description upon request of the City. The Society would provide its own insurance; maintain and operate the facility; maintain regular posted office hours; maintain and provide space for law enforcement to deliver non-injured animals taken into custody; collect fees for pet adoption, pet licenses, impound services, quarantine, microchip implantation, boarding, euthanasia; and maintain complete books and records of all funds collected and all animals taken into custody and impounded. The Society would retain all monies collected except those collected for pet licenses or by PetData.

Councilmember Bierman asked Mr. Bechtel to talk about the benefits of a public/private partnership versus moving the Animal Welfare Center into its own department within the City and Mr. Bechtel said this proposal is a business model used by thousands of cities, specifically in the animal field whether that is a zoo or municipal animal shelter. He said combining the two entities would provide many more resources and flexibility and is a really good amalgamation that works really well to provide excellent services for a robust facility.

Councilmember Bierman asked why the City would not simply move the Animal Welfare Center to its own department instead of partnering with a non-profit entity and Mr. Darrel Pyle, City Manager, said the model of animal control or welfare being a function of the Norman Police Department (NPD) is very common coast to coast and it may have originated from instances of calls for service, i.e., dog bite, vicious animal, etc. He said there are many models across the country where the city government runs its own Animal Shelter and there are also just as many examples of partnerships with various non-profit organizations to provide the service with a focus on the adoption side. He said the fund raising essence of how non-profits provide that service does nothing but add value to insure positive outcomes and all of the services the City currently provides will continue to be provided. He said Staff has reviewed this proposal from all angles and the model being proposed tonight results in the best outcome for animals. Mr. Bechtel said moving the Animal Welfare Center to another department will not improve its ability to do a better job or expand services provided.

Councilmember Bierman asked how much money the City would save or not save by making this move and Mr. Pyle said the City could avoid further requests of the General Fund (GF) for money for facility maintenance. He said, most recently, the Animal Welfare Center had some serious heating and air conditioning issues with no funding mechanism to address that issue. Under this relationship the City can identify approximately \$150,000 annually invested back into the facility without impact to the GF.

Councilmember Wilson felt this partnership could be hugely beneficial. She said as far as private donations, the Society would be more flexible in accepting those because currently, donations have to be approved by Council and appropriated to the proper fund for purchases, which can take time. Mr. Bechtel agreed that donations going to the Society would be much more efficient. Councilmember Wilson said she would be more concerned about donations meant for Norman animals going to other programs the Society may have and asked if that had been discussed and Mr. Bechtel said no, Staff only talked about donations in general.

Mr. Pyle said Staff can clarify, in writing, that when Norman residents have an idea they want to see come to fruition in the Norman facility, then that donation would be specifically used for the Norman facility and Councilmember Wilson said she would like to have that in writing.

Councilmember Wilson asked about exporting animals out of state that are difficult to adopt out versus keeping them in Norman and Mr. Pyle said animals that are difficult to adopt out is an area of expertise with the Society and their giant network almost guarantees a successful adoption for every animal, not just the cute cuddly ones. He said Norman has a good population of large, sturdy dogs and the Society knows where each breed is in the highest demand nationwide.

Councilmember Wilson asked what would happen to City employees currently employed at the facility and Mr. Bechtel said this proposal is in the beginning stages of talks, but the Society may be willing to hire current employees to expand their abilities. He said if not, the employees could be moved to other available positions within the City. Mr. Pyle said in initial conversations, the Society seems to be willing to work with the City regarding current employees because they are highly motivated in having a successful facility.

Councilmember Wilson said her only concern would be what would happen if the agreement fails because it may take more than 180 days to ramp back up into a fully functioning facility and Mr. Bechtel agreed and said Staff will be preparing a process for that.

Councilmember Scanlon said this was discussed at the Oversight Committee and there was a lot of concern about how this proposal would be financially better for the City and Animal Welfare Center employees. He was heartened to hear there may be a soft landing for the employees. He said the Animal Welfare Center prides itself on the high live release rate and asked if that had been discussed and Mr. Bechtel said yes, the Society has assured Staff they want to keep or improve on that rate.

Councilmember Petrone asked how many current employees will keep their employment if this proposal is approved and Mr. Bechtel said out of 16 employees, approximately six will be retained by the City.

Councilmember Petrone asked if animal trapping of skunks, opossums, etc., will still be provided and, if so, what happens to those animals once they are trapped? Mr. Trey Amrein, Animal Welfare Officer Supervisor, said the City will continue to provide that service and wildlife animals are taken to Wild Care, which is a wildlife rehab facility in Noble.

Councilmember Petrone asked if adoption fees will increase and Mr. Bechtel said that is anticipated and would be negotiated.

Councilmember Petrone asked if the Animal Welfare Center is debt free and Mr. Anthony Francisco, Director of Finance, said yes, the bonds have been paid off.

Councilmember Petrone asked if the Animal Welfare Oversight Committee (AWOC) would still maintain the same influential oversight it has today in regards to drafting ordinances and Mr. Bechtel said yes, they can still do that, but would not have no authority over the facility operations.

Mr. Bechtel said the Society would also submit monthly reports to the City's Director of Finance that includes the total number of animals impounded at the shelter facility, including, when available, the location where an animal came from and identification of the source of the animal; purpose for which each animal was brought to shelter facility; total number of rabies tests performed; final disposition of animals; number of animals registered/licensed and total fees

collected; total monies collected; and any other information requested by City with reasonable advance notice to the Society.

The City would pay the Society \$400,000 per year for the services rendered by the Society pursuant to the proposed agreement; pay Society \$35 for each animal transferred to Society by the City; provide Society with basic internet access and landline telephone service; provide emergency after hour veterinarian care for animals not yet in possession of the Society; and be responsible for all maintenance, upkeep, and utility costs for the structure.

Mr. Bechtel said any fines imposed by the Court would belong to the City and two Councilmembers would be voting members of the Society's Board of Directors. He said for matters related to animal enforcement and control, the Police Chief and City Attorney would act as City liaisons.

Mayor Clark agreed the Police Chief should serve on the Board of Directors, but if this Board will take the place of AWOC she would like to have a citizen voice on the Board and asked if that could be negotiated and Mr. Bechtel said the Society would probably be open to that.

Mayor Clark asked if there had been discussions about what would happen to AWOC and Mr. Bechtel said yes, the Society has been clear that AWOC would not have authority over the Animal Welfare Center under the Society's agreement. He said AWOC can advise on changes to ordinances, but not oversight over the facility. Mayor Clark said why have an AWOC if they do not have oversight authority? She would like AWOC to have some input on how the Society operates the facility.

Councilmember Holman asked how policies, such as complaints, would be handled, through the City or the Society? Mr. Bechtel said that is why there will be a few City employees remaining at the facility.

Councilmember Holman said there is no real loss of oversight because it is still the City's facility and asked how City ordinances and the Society's policies will interact and Mr. Bechtel said per the agreement, the Society will work within the City's ordinances.

Councilmember Holman asked if the Society is non-profit and Mr. Bechtel said yes they are a non-profit organization.

Councilmember Hall asked if the Society is under the umbrella of a national organization and Mr. Bechtel said he is not sure about that, but they are the *Oklahoma* Humane Society. Councilmember Hall asked where in Oklahoma do they currently have public/private partnerships and Mr. Pyle said they gather animals from other animal control operations for their adoption program. He said the model Norman is considering will be the first of its kind in their portfolio, but they are hoping to operate in other municipalities within the metro area. Mr. Bechtel said they operate in The Village in Oklahoma City, which is a very small city.

Councilmember Hall said she is concerned about what will happen with current City employees. Will they be guaranteed a position with the Society? Mr. Bechtel said they would be interviewed and hired by the Society and their current position would weigh heavily into that decision. Councilmember Hall said if they were not hired by the Society, would the City be proactive in trying to move them into another City position and Mr. Pyle said one of the opportunities available is the fact that the City has been under a hiring freeze since November 2019, so there are vacancies for transfer of the employee(s) based on their experience and tenure.

Items submitted for the record

1. PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Norman Animal Welfare Center"
2. Draft Contract

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The meeting was adjourned at 6:28 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor