



Coachella Valley Animal Campus Commission Meeting (Minutes)

Animal Campus Commission

Voting Members

Cathedral City

Nancy Ross **Chair**
Ernesto Gutierrez (Alternate)

City of Coachella

Denise Delgado
Frank Figueroa (Alternate)

City of Desert Hot Springs

Daniel Pitts
Dirk Voss (Alternate)

City of Indian Wells

Greg Sanders
Bruce Whitman (Alternate)

City of Indio

Glen Miller
Kim Hardee (Alternate)

City of La Quinta

Steve Sanchez **Vice Chair**
Kathleen Fitzpatrick (Alternate)

City of Palm Desert

Evan Trubee
Karina Quintanilla (Alternate)

City of Rancho Mirage

Michael O'Keefe
Lynn Mallotto (Alternate)

District 4

Supervisor V. Manuel Perez
Esmeralda Perez (Alternate)

Non-Voting Members

Animal Samaritans Ex-Officio

Tom Snyder

Loving All Animals Ex-Officio

Michael Phipps Russell
Shelley Daily (Alternate)

Palm Springs Animal Shelter

Ex-Officio

Dan Rossi
Tamara Hedges

RCDAS Staff

Charissa Leach
Dr. Kimberly Youngberg
Kasey Saldarelli
Kristen Hassen (Consultant)

Thursday – February 06, 2025

9:30 a.m.

Commission Meeting
In-Person

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Mayor Nancy Ross, Cathedral City.

2. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The Animal Campus Commission Meeting was called to order on Thursday, February 06, 2025, at 9:33 a.m. in person by Mayor, Nancy (**Chair**), Cathedral City.

A roll call was conducted by the Mayor; Nancy Ross (**Chair**), Cathedral City, it was determined that there was a quorum. The following Commission members were present:

Members in Attendance: Quorum Met

- Cathedral City, Mayor Nancy Ross (**Chair**)
- City of Coachella, Councilmember Frank Figueroa
- City of Desert Hot Springs, Councilmember Daniel Pitts
- City of Indian Wells, Councilmember Greg Sanders
- City of Indio, Community Member Kim Hardee
- City of La Quinta, Councilmember Steve Sanchez (**Vice Chair**)
- City of Palm Desert, Councilmember Evan Trubee
- City of Rancho Mirage - (Not Present)
- County of Riverside, Supervisor V. Manuel Perez, District 4

Ex. Officio's in Attendance:

- Tom Snyder, CEO, Animal Samaritans
- Michael Phipps Russell, Loving All Animals
- Tamara Hedges, President, Palm Springs Animal Shelter
- Dan Rossi, Executive Director, Palm Spring Animal Shelter

Staff in Attendance:

- Charissa Leach Asst. County Exec. Officer, RCDAS
- Kim Youngberg, Interim Director, RCDAS
- Kristen Hassen (Outcomes for Pets), Outside Consultant for RCDAS
- Kasey Saldarelli, Executive Assistant/Commission Sec., RCDAS

3. Election of Chair (February 2025): NO ACTION NEEDED

- On December 05, 2024, Mayor Nancy Ross, Cathedral City was voted Chair (5/3), and Councilmember Steve Sanchez, City of La Quinta was voted Vice-Chair (7/1).

4. Updates to the Agenda: Tom Snyder with Animal Samaritans requested to speak briefly as he needed to leave the Commission early. Tom Snyder handed out “Animal Samaritans & Desert Cities Pet Spay/Neuter Partnership Proposal 2025”. Requested participation from the cities in promoting free spay/neuter services and qualifying their residents for services by verifying their proof of residency but also qualifying limits on household income. \$1900 for single households, \$2500 for multiple households are too low. Tom suggested that it should be at \$3000 to \$6000. This can be reviewed and brought to the table when everyone has the opportunity.

5. Approval of Minutes: Supervisor V. Mauel Perez; County of Riverside motioned for approval of past minutes for December 05, 2024, and Frank Figueroa; City of Coachella seconded the motion. Minutes were approved.

6. Staff Reports and Action Items: No Staff Reports or Actions were submitted.

7. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Christopher Craig – waived time. Filled out speaker card referenced transparency and professionalism.

Sara Dickerson – Resources need to be provided to the community.

Lindi Biggi – We must continue to work together. The supply and demand of companion animals is not thriving. The solution is either authorization or sterilize. The contract needs to end.

Janet McAfee – Cancel contract. There are better ways of spending millions.

Lisa Blodgett – Cancel contract. The district supervisor is not listening to how no kill works. No Kill is urgent.

Georgia L. – Appreciates everyone contributing to a solution. Spay and neuter is the solution. We need change. The new director has a tainted past. The Commission and Board of Supervisors have heard from us all and know a consultant is not needed.

Christine Ziegler – Mobile spay and neuter should be going to animal populated areas.

Judy Garland – There is so much miscommunication taking place. People are not being utilized. We need a marketing strategy.

Pegie Crowley – Approves changes made with calming shot for euthanasia.

Alan Woodruff – These matters have been ongoing for 2 years and we have seen no progress. Become a No Kill Shelter.

(*Written Comments)

* Brad Anderson

8. ANIMAL CAMPUS COMMISSION MEMBERS AND DIRECTOR COMMENTS:

8.1 Commission Members

- **City of Indio – Community Member Kim Hardee** – There are many spay and neuter programs. Each bus can only handle about 30 dogs. The county bus would be perfect for TNR cats. We need a facility and a bus to be able to perform surgeries on large dogs. The buses are unable to go out every day due to the shortage of veterinarians. We need to reach out to the source which are private veterinarians to see if they can assist with 10 animals a month. To mandate spay and neuter would be a huge mistake as everyone will break the law which will lead to fines and illegal dumping. The expansion of the shelter should not be questioned, we need another shelter. Each city needs to step up. We only have 8 animal control officers for the whole valley. We need to expand the labor force and the shelter. We need to find a solution.
- **Cathedral City – Councilmember Nancy Ross (Chair)** – We are all trying to do better, everyone cares and has the intentions to find the solution! Nancy reiterated that a policy review was needed, there is not enough funding, shortage of vaccines, doctors, staff and buses. We have too many dogs and cats. The box is too big and recommends breaking up into groups on the topics concerned to come up with ideas moving forward. Everything suggested was great, but it is too much to absorb at one time.
- **Desert Hot Spring – Councilmember Daniel Pitts** – I feel that we need a no kill shelter. I also support a strong spay/neuter program.
- **City of Coachella – Councilmember Frank Figueroa** – A no kill status cannot happen overnight. It is all about working together! What is the future and how do we get there is the information we are waiting to get. Do issues arise with talent or budget?
- **City of La Quinta – Councilmember Steve Sanchez (Vice Chair)** – Inquired about the spay and neuter buses that are operated by the county. Supports a no kill shelter. Questioned the difference between a vet and a high volume spay and neuter vet and if purchasing a new mobile bus would be the answer.
- **Riverside County Supervisor V. Manuel Perez** – The supervisor reassured the Commission that they have the commitment of the County and as a supervisor he will continue to support on all levels. We have made significant progress in the last six months with euthanasia procedure revision, spay/neuter increase, hiring of a new director, looking at staffing and pay, evaluating an increase in shelter hours, improving our facilities, looking into the volunteer program. Supervisor is interested in what it would take for the county to get to no kill. This could involve looking at revising the policies and procedures but also re-evaluating an increase in city funding streams but also looking at the County's budget to figure out how we can provide more funding to ensure that we have another location at the Eastend. We could also look at current locations that exist within County facilities such as the Thermal Airport and Fairgrounds to potentially have a mobile unit come in the summer, this would also provide air conditioning for folks and pets. Another

possibility would be to establish a partnership with area non-profits. Can we do it now and be responsible and accountable and do it right and not have lawsuits? The supervisor appreciates everyone's guidance and would like to make this happen by suggesting we put it on paper, make a timeline and budget. Time will tell who is going to be responsible, let's find a strategic plan.

- **City of Indian Wells - Councilmember Greg Sanders** – I also support a no kill shelter.
- **City of Rancho Mirage** – (Not Present)
- **City of Palm Desert Evan Trubee** – Acknowledged that everything mentioned needs to be a collaborative effort on all ends. Evan Inquired about the facility capacity and what it was designed to accommodate. He also wanted to know how old the facility was and whether it could be expanded! Mr. Trubee recommended more adoption programs, a more robust spay and neuter program and supports a no kill shelter.

8.2 Riverside County Department of Animals Services

- **RCDAS Interim Director Kimberly Youngberg** – Today we present our new updates for procedures on euthanasia. Each animal will be given a pre sedative prior to euthanasia, this was directed at all staff. We have put together a handbook for Commission members. I would like to highlight the role of the commission and the purpose and intent to the commission. We would love to collaborate on a deeper level. At a previous commission meeting, there was a call for a group to come together as a subcommittee for education. That might be something we need to agendize and get going again. Please visit our website as we have an event tab with upcoming events. We are participating in the Riverside County Fair where dogs will be available for adoption. We have a mass spay/neuter event with an organization called Animal Balance, that will take place in April. We have a spay/neuter calendar that we are getting ready to launch. Great news, an offer was accepted for another veterinarian to join our team. Our new Chief Veterinarian Amy Raines starts today. There are still two vacancies that need recruitment. We do not openly advertise deposits for pets, but we do have grant funding to help sponsor that and fix it tickets. Constituents are given a certain amount of time to get it resolved. We are always willing to help!
- In response to councilmember Steve Sanchez – The county operates two working buses. There are other non-profit groups and others that offer buses. One of the buses has a holding capacity that can alter animals up to 30 lbs. and the other bus can alter animals up to 40 lbs. To facilitate larger dogs, that would depend on the surgeon. Working on large female dogs can be difficult in a mobile unit. Preference for large dogs would be in a clinic facility. Currently the county charges \$3000 per event. The county paid \$250,000 for the bus, but they are now going for \$500,000. Staff required for a bus include: DVM, two registered veterinary techs., one vet asst, and a few supporting staff. The skillset is the difference between a vet and a high volume spay/neuter vet. The barrier to having another bus is the lack of a veterinarian, keep in mind that we would still need a surgeon. Getting services to the valley is a challenge but a facility for large animals is more of the answer than a

mobile unit. All buses can perform surgeries on puppies. If we catch them young, then it works! The only true barrier is staff.

- In response to councilmember Evan Trubee – The Coachella Valley Animal Campus was built in 2004. We hired a firm called Animal Arts that will be doing a capacity study on the area to determine if there is a need to expand out shelter holding. Expected report to be in by Spring of 2025. We have a short-term foster program available.
- In response to Ex-Officio Tamara Hedges – I believe we have 100 dog kennels and probably holding space for 150 cats. Our current inventory is around 180 to 200 dogs, and our cat numbers are excellent.
- In response to Frank Figueroa – The problem is not the budget.
- In response to Michael Phipps Russell – I absolutely agree and will follow up on additional support services for staff members performing high volume euthanasia. I will be working closely with our vet services staff to work things out.
- **Outcomes for Pets – Kristen Hassen** – Encouraged everyone to read the contract as the amount continue to be brought up. Outcomes for Pets is a consulting group. One of the things we bring to the table is a different set of solutions. Many things and expectations have changed. Riverside County cannot be compared with other shelters. About 15% of dogs come through the Coachella shelter. 70% of cats that come in are kittens. Animal Services have become complex. We hear the frustrations, and they make sense. A different answer is needed. A bigger approach is needed by all of you. Understanding what we are putting together comes from what you guys are telling us. There is a national veterinarian shortage. A lot of the strategy is to contract with organizations that nationally do spay/neuter work. It is something we may consider doing in the future. Please take the survey link on the RCDAS website. Left meeting at 11:01am.

8.3 Ex-Officio Members

- **Ex. Officio Tamar Hedges – Palm Springs Animal Shelter** – In terms of kennels, what is the number? Our budget is close to 7 million, and we raise most of that. It is 5 times what you are paying, and it is a fraction of what it costs us to run our shelter. We have 60 employees, and our shelter was built to house 60 dogs and around 120 cats. We are now triple the capacity! We have partnered with the City of Desert Hot Springs to operate the clinic there with a plan to open the clinic in April and operate evenings and weekends. We want to open our doors to everyone and offer affordable, accessible healthcare for pets. Our wildlife in Coachella Valley is really struggling. We are excited and hoping that our wildlife center will open in spring. Our hotline is up. Kim, I hope to set up a meeting to work with you and do some public education around wildlife.

- **Ex. Officio Dan Ross – Palm Springs Animal Shelter** – We just wanted to share our 2024 numbers. We had a domestic intake of 26,000 where we should only be seeing 1,000. We are aware that these animals come from other cities. We are doing what we can, but it is not sustainable. We accomplished 33,000 spay/neuters and almost reached 15,000 surgeries for TNR cats. We did over 6,000 low-cost vaccines.
- **Ex. Officio Tom Snyder – Animal Samaritans CEO** – The shortage of veterinarians is hard to come by. We had a grant to offer spay and neuter clinics and were able to perform 20 surgeries a day. We aim to have 7 more clinics this year. Maybe what the cities could think about is allocating a portion of the budget to a collective high volume spay and neuter doctor that the Coachella valley uses, then every city would be vested.
- **Ex. Officio Alternate Michael Phipps Russell – Loving All Animals** – The Thousand Palms facility did not include The City of Indio. The building schematics did, however, design the shelter to be able to be expanded to build another pod or extend the current pod. The City of Palm Desert was the project lead. I realized this might be a budget items, but please consider additional support that the American Veterinarian Medical Association recommends for staff members who are performing this high-volume euthanasia. Loving All Animals would like to book 12 more clinics. We will include a free tag and collar. Thanks to the seed money and additional work with the City of Coachella, we will be building a specialty veterinary clinic. Part of the plan is to include an area where the mobile vehicle can park during the summer months, this will allow us to have a year-round mobile vet. There are issues in our contracts, you should review your city contract. I believe there is one line that is not letting our community move forward to NO KILL, and that has to do with the definition of “treatable which is very limited. It is leaving the department of animal services in an unpleasant situation. If the department complies with your statements, our euthanasia will probably go up. If they perform the extra work, they will be in violation of your contract. I do not believe our written policies match our wishes in the court of public opinion. I think we need to bring this all together to a single voice. Your policies make a difference! We must do it for the animals and be strategic and plan together.

9. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The next Animal Campus Commission Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 03, 2025; at 9:30 a.m. in person (location TBD).

10. ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 11:20 a.m.