



City of Richmond

Report to Council

To:	Richmond City Council	Date:	October 18 th , 2004
From:	Councillor Linda Barnes, Chair, Community Safety Committee	File:	03-1000-05-021/Vol 01
Re:	RICHMOND HOMELESS CATS SOCIETY – RICHMOND SPCA SHELTER		

The Community Safety Committee, at its meeting held on October 13th, 2004, considered the attached material, and recommends as follows:

Committee Recommendation

- (1) *That the proposal of the Richmond Homeless Cats Society to assume responsibility for the operation of the Richmond Animal Shelter (currently operated by the SPCA), be referred to staff for evaluation and consideration, including within that evaluation, any future direct cost implications to the City; and*
- (2) *That execution of any contract between the City and the SPCA be suspended until after completion of the review of the proposal put forward by the Richmond Homeless Cats Society*

Councillor Linda Barnes, Chair
Community Safety Committee

Attach.

Proposal for Operation of City of Richmond Animal Shelter

October 13, 2004

1000-05-021
Handed out at
Community Safety Meeting
Item 3 Oct 13/04

The Richmond Homeless Cats Society has provided service to pet owners in this community since 1989. We have built and operate the largest cat sanctuary in North America, with approximately 800 animals now in residence. Our sanctuary is operated by our board of directors and is maintained by 100 dedicated volunteers, most of whom are Richmond residents. We are well respected throughout the Lower Mainland and our facility is serving as a model for shelters that are being built in other communities.

Although our primary focus has been the rescue, shelter and care of cats, we are very concerned about the welfare of all animals in our community. Our volunteer force is comprised of individuals who are experienced caregivers of dogs, rabbits and other types of companion animals. Two of our members are formally educating themselves to become behaviour trainers for dogs. We are part of a large network of animal welfare and rescue groups throughout Greater Vancouver and have access to a lot of resources.

The animal welfare community at large has been seeking no-kill solutions to animal overpopulation and homelessness, and there has been much publicized dissatisfaction with the policies and practices of the BCSPCA. The BCSPCA once operated all of the municipal shelters in the Lower Mainland, but in the last few years, several municipalities have decided to discontinue their shelter contracts. These include Vancouver, Coquitlam, North Vancouver, Langley and, most recently, Delta.

We recently submitted a letter to Richmond Council asking that the City not sign another contract with the SPCA (see Attachment "A"). We believe the citizens of Richmond and their companion animals would be best served by a change in the management of the Richmond Animal Shelter. There is a need for a fresh approach to the care of homeless animals in this city.

We are asking for an opportunity to take over the contract for the Richmond Animal Shelter, which we would operate as the newly named "Richmond Humane Society." We are confident that we could transform our municipal shelter into a facility that our community could truly be proud of.

Under our management, the practise of "euthanizing" animals would no longer take place at the city shelter. Richmond citizens are reluctant to volunteer at a facility where they know they would interact with animals that may be destroyed. Also, we have been told by many SPCA volunteers in various municipalities that they often disagree with the shelter managers' decisions about euthanizing for "behavioural problems" or because the animals have minor, treatable ailments.

Animals in our care would be euthanized by a licensed veterinarian in a veterinary clinic, not by shelter staff, and ONLY when they are suffering from incurable injury or illness or, in the case of dogs, when they have proven to be dangerous and beyond rehabilitation. Cats that are unadoptable would automatically be moved to the Richmond Homeless Cats Sanctuary for lifetime care.

Richmond Animal Shelter, under our direction as a local organization, would apply tax dollars to Richmond animals, not those brought in from communities across British Columbia. Also, lost pet animals would be sheltered as long as necessary in our community and not transferred out, as has been the practice of the SPCA. When the SPCA transfers animals to shelters in other municipalities, the animals are assigned new identification numbers, making it next to impossible to trace them. Keeping stray animals in our community will make it much more likely for them to be reunited with their owners.

We have proven our ability to recruit, motivate and retain a large number of volunteers and could greatly increase the volunteer complement at the Richmond Animal Shelter.

With the approval of the City of Richmond, and cooperation of the unions associated with the City, **we would undertake to improve the appearance of the property at the front of the shelter** so that it satisfies the City's high standards which are so evident elsewhere and which have earned the City much praise and awards. That area currently has the appearance of neglect and does not present a positive first impression to visitors as they drive onto the property (see Attachment "B"). We would like to upgrade that area so that it is well groomed, attractive and welcoming. A project like that would create an enticing opportunity for community involvement and would generate pride among the volunteers.

We would also undertake to improve living conditions for the animals within the shelter. Cats are currently kept in small cages in a very small, narrow, windowless room. An environment like that causes depression, anxiety and sometimes aggressive behaviours. We would like to build a communal area for cats that is well equipped to provide opportunities for exercise and emotional well-being. We would improve living conditions for all of the animals in the shelter in order to ward off depression so that they will have the best chance for adoption.

The costs of improvements to the Richmond Animal Shelter could be covered through our fundraising efforts. We have been promised the support of one former Richmond company owner, Al Brew of Columbia Machine Works, who has been a major supporter of our cat sanctuary and who hopes to one day build a sanctuary for dogs in our municipality (see letter attached).

We encourage Council to visit the municipal animal shelter in Langley to see the progress made during the past year since the Langley Animal Protection Society (LAPS) replaced the SPCA. LAPS formed a partnership with the City of Langley and Langley Township to create a better animal shelter on land purchased by the municipality. Their new shelter sits on 6 rural acres with very large, well groomed, newly fenced day pens for the dogs. The shelter building boasts a very attractive communal living area for cats. Because the building is quite old, the municipality has agreed to replace it with a new building. We'd like to point out, however, that the age of the current building did not detract from the warm, welcoming atmosphere that we experienced when we were greeted by staff and volunteers there. You could tell that it is not "just a job" to the people who work at that shelter. Staff and volunteers share compassion toward the animals and a desire to provide high-quality service to the community.

With your approval, we will exert the same quality of effort into improving the municipal shelter as has been put toward building our cat sanctuary. Richmond tax dollars will be spent in a way that will reflect on us as a community that truly cares about its companion animals.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carol Reichert".

Carol Reichert
President
Richmond Homeless Cats Society

Richmond Homeless Cats Society

"From a street life to a safe life"

Mayor Malcolm Brodie & Council
City of Richmond
6911 No. 3 Road
Richmond, B.C.
V6Y 2C1

September 15, 2004

Dear Mayor Brodie and Council:

Five years ago, the City of Richmond paved the way for the Richmond Homeless Cats Society to build a world-class animal sanctuary in east Richmond. **On behalf of our Society, I am writing to ask you to reconsider your plan to renew the SPCA's shelter contract and to allow the time for alternative groups to come forth and bid for that contract.**

Many other municipalities in the Lower Mainland have chosen to discontinue their shelter arrangements with the BCSPCA. The City of Delta most recently decided to offer their shelter to bids by other groups, because of dissatisfaction in their community over the SPCA's performance. You may have heard about the upset among that SPCA shelter's own staff, who disagreed with their manager's decision to euthanize a young dog for aggression and removed him to the care of outside resources. Professional dog behaviourists assessed the dog and determined that he could be rehabilitated. The Richmond and Delta shelters have the same SPCA manager, Michelle Rodgers.

We tried to establish a cooperative relationship with the SPCA to end their practise of "euthanizing" cats that are difficult to handle or adopt. For a brief time, cats that were considered feral (including kittens), elderly, or aggressive due to fearfulness were transferred into our care by previous SPCA management so that we could rehabilitate and adopt them out or provide them with a permanent home at our sanctuary.

We were recently stunned to learn through the media that the current SPCA manager of your shelter has been killing healthy cats unnecessarily. Since taking over as manager, Ms. Rodgers has never contacted our organization even though we are on the BCSPCA master list of approved outside resources. When I tried to call Ms. Rodgers to introduce myself, my call was not returned.

Ms. Rodgers apparently stopped transferring cats to our facility when her staff told her that we'd asked them to pay \$30 for a test that identifies cats with feline AIDS and leukemia, both of which are communicable to other cats. The test can be purchased by the BCSPCA hospital at a cost of only \$17.65. Nonetheless, had Ms. Rodgers called to tell me that they wouldn't pay for the test, I would have continued to accept "unadoptable" cats from the City shelter. With North America's largest cat sanctuary on their

doorstep, there's no excuse for the killing of cats in this community.

Ms. Rodgers has not represented the SPCA or the City of Richmond in the best possible light by failing to build bridges with community resources. It should be her mandate to save the lives of the animals in her care and to never euthanize when there is an alternative.

We are sheltering hundreds of cats for Richmond citizens who avoided the City shelter because they feared their pets (or the strays in their yards) would be euthanized. Many people have told us they would not visit the City shelter or volunteer there, because they know that the animals there may be killed. We have also heard about conflicts between shelter volunteers and staff and that at one point all of the City's dog volunteers quit en masse.

The BCSPCA lost the respect of the local animal welfare community when they became mired in bureaucracy. Sixty percent of the money donated to them is spent on salaries and only 10% is spent on veterinary care and spay/neuter. Animals in their custody are killed when they have treatable, minor ailments like colds and fungal infections. When the Richmond shelter was using the same veterinarian as our organization, we saved several ill and injured cats from euthanasia by asking to have them transferred into our care. We were also compelled to adopt a dog with a severely infected uterus, in order to save her life. The SPCA hospitalized the dog and kept her on support for a week without surgery. As is their policy, when the required waiting period was up and an owner did not surface, she was slated for euthanasia. The expense the SPCA incurred for her hospitalization was comparable to the cost of the life-saving surgery. **Is this how the citizens of Richmond want to see animals treated by their municipal shelter? Surely, the public would like to know that when stray cats and dogs are found ill or hit by cars, they will receive life-saving treatment.**

The SPCA brings cats and dogs to the Richmond shelter from outside of our municipality. Richmond's homeless animals receive only a small share of their resources. Perhaps that is why so many dogs were also euthanized in our city last year.

Ms. Rodgers was quoted in the Vancouver Sun as saying that she killed 16 cats in Richmond last year because of aggression. SPCA staff and volunteers have told us that their organization assesses aggression in caged cats by poking them with a pen through the bars. It is a natural response for even the gentlest cats to act defensively out of fear in a shelter environment, especially when they are being kept in close proximity to barking dogs. We have adopted out cats that the SPCA deemed feral/aggressive and would have euthanized. The people in our organization know how to work with these animals and rehabilitate them.

Another 18 cats were euthanized in Richmond last year because, according to Ms. Rodgers, they were suffering from illness. We wonder if any of these could have been cured with veterinary treatment. The citizens of Richmond can take their terminally ill pets to be euthanized by veterinarians. This service does not have to be performed by a municipal shelter.

The SPCA has never offered services to Richmond citizens like those provided by the Richmond Homeless Cats Society. We humanely trap lost pet cats and strays, then return them to their

owners or provide veterinary treatment and then move them to the safety of our sanctuary. We provide partial or completely subsidized spay/neuter assistance to low income families, and will pick up and transport pets to and from the vet. We assist elderly and disabled cat owners, and the families of cat owners who have died or gone into nursing homes. We operate an education program in Richmond elementary schools to foster respect for animals and to create a future population of responsible pet owners. Our expertise about cat behaviour and care makes us an excellent resource for pet owners with problems, and we are often able to convince people to not surrender their pets. Further, we support and have practised Trap-neuter-release (TNR), which is the internationally acknowledged, humane method of controlling feral cat populations. The BCSPCA has a long-standing policy of destroying feral cats in their custody.

The City of Richmond should strive to become a no-kill community by contracting with an organization that will bring a fresh approach to operating your shelter. The City of Vancouver took back control of their dog shelter in order to become no-kill. We ask that your municipal shelter be operated by individuals with compassion for the animals in their care—who will seek out no-kill solutions for animals that present challenges.

Again, we ask that you not finalize another two-year contract with the SPCA, but instead open up your contract to bids by other interested groups. The public is always best served by a competitive bidding process. Given the opportunity, we will be pleased to submit a proposal. There are more than 100 dedicated individuals in our organization (most of them Richmond residents) and many are experienced in dealing with all types of companion animals.

The existing situation is not compassionate and requires change.

Sincerely,



Carol Reichert
President

cc: Don Pearson,
Manager of Community Bylaws

PROPOSED RICHMOND HUMANE SOCIETY SHELTER

VS

SPCA SHELTER

-
- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Governed locally to best suit community needs | ■ Governed by a Head Office
- lots of red tape |
| ■ Easy to get donors when money goes directly to animals | ■ Donors reluctant because of highly paid management salaries |
| ■ Lost animals easy for owners to recover – sheltered locally | ■ Lost animals hard to trace because of transfer to other municipalities |
| ■ Attractive environment and flexibility attracts volunteers | ■ Inflexible scheduling = less volunteers, volunteer burnout and drop off |
| ■ No euthanasia or incinerator at site = happier volunteers & public | ■ Volunteers discouraged by euthanasia and presence of incinerator |
| ■ Improved, comfortable & stimulating environment for animals | ■ Shelter is depressing; cats in cramped cages; basic needs are met |
| ■ No euthanasia of cats and more dogs adoptable with behaviour training; will access other community resources for help when needed | ■ Cats euthanized for fearful behaviour, mature age or minor illnesses; less inclined to access outside resources |
| ■ Compassionate animal care & great public service; extended hours | ■ Restricted hours of operation; no voicemail; unionized staff aren't all devoted to animals |
| ■ Reduce pet overpopulation by providing financial assistance to low income citizens for spay/neuter, pick-up & delivery of pets if necessary; advertise City's spay/neuter bylaw | |
| ■ Trapping assistance/recovery of lost pet cats | |
| ■ Fewer pets surrendered because of behaviour counselling | |
| ■ Education program in elementary schools | |

**How many dogs like Lucy
have lost their lives
because of uncaring SPCA policies?**



The Richmond SPCA took Lucy, a stray German Shepherd cross, to No. 2 Road Animal Hospital where she was diagnosed with a severely infected uterus that needed to be removed. The life-saving surgery would cost \$600, but the SPCA instead asked the vet to insert an IV line and begin antibiotic treatment.

When Lucy arrived at the clinic on the Thursday morning, she was weak but able to walk; however, by Saturday she was too sick to even stand. The vet's assistant changed the dog's bedding every few hours as pus oozed from her bottom. On the following Tuesday, she overheard an SPCA employee telling the vet that he could euthanize Lucy in two more days, as the City of Richmond's required week of waiting would be up.

Richmond Homeless Cats Society received a frantic telephone call at 6:30 a.m. on Wednesday. The sobbing vet's assistant had been up all night and was so distressed she was planning to quit her job that day.

We quickly took action to save Lucy's life. By 8:30 a.m., our supporter, Al Brew, delivered \$700 to the vet clinic. We then called the SPCA and arranged to have Lucy released into our care. Although the vet doubted that the dog would survive, he surgically removed a pus-filled uterus the size of a loaf of bread. By day's end, Lucy was standing and on the road to recovery. Adopted by Carol Reichert, Lucy greets her new family each morning with her favorite ball in her mouth, her tail happily wagging.

A week of hospitalization would have cost the SPCA more than the cost of Lucy's surgery. Saving the dog's life was not their priority. **How many animals like Lucy have there been?**

Attachment "B"

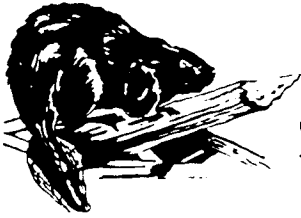
Richmond Animal Shelter – dog exercise area at left of driveway is barren and surrounded by barbed-wire fencing. Dogs must stay close to the building in order to seek shade.



Richmond Homeless Cats Sanctuary – cat bungalows were built, lawns sodded and gardens planted by volunteers. Flowers and shrubbery are now well established and overflow the flower boxes.



If we are granted the City's animal shelter contract, we will rally animal-loving volunteers to beautify the dog exercise area and entrance to the property in order to create an attractive, welcoming environment for visitors, volunteers and staff. Dogs will enjoy their time out of their kennels in a more comfortable play area.



COLUMBIA MACHINE WORKS LTD.

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October 7, 2004

City of Richmond
6911 No. 3 Road
Richmond, BC
V6Y 2C1

Attention: Mayor Malcolm Brodie

Dear Sir:

Columbia Machine Works Ltd. has been a supporter of the Richmond Homeless Cat Shelter since its inception 5 year ago.

We look forward to working with the Richmond Homeless Cats Society and the City of Richmond in providing a facility, which is truly concerned with the humane care of animals.

Yours truly,
Columbia Machine Works Ltd.

Allan C. Brew

SAWMILL SPECIALISTS



richmondhomelesscats@hotmail.com

Printed: September 28, 2004 10:06:42 AM

From : june price <juprice@telus.net>
Sent : September 27, 2004 9:52:34 AM
To : <mail@richmondhomelesscats.com>
Subject : Recent Visit To Shelter

Hello - just a short note to tell you how much we enjoyed our visit to Richmond Homeless yesterday. We have been donors for a few years but this was our first visit & we were totally amazed at the care & love all the kitties receive. Also a very BIG thank you to Judy who was kind enough to introduce us to all the resident's & explain everything. So sorry we missed seeing Marie but had a chance to talk to her when we brought items out for the GARAGE SALE. You are providing a wonderful & much needed service & we were so happy to see the cats so content & happy! Even the AIDS kitties didn't look like they were sick or suffering. We have adopted many kitties from the S.P.C.A & it is so sad to see how those cats have to live in such closed surroundings & crowded & confined spaces. We usually leave there feeling so sad that we can't take them all home. I'm sure you can relate. Again we left your shelter feeling so good that so many homeless cat's were able to enjoy such a good quality of life. I'm sure they all show their appreciation in so many ways - so affectionate we found most of them to be - not just wanting treats but a pet & kind word. Thank you again for showing us this beautiful sanctuary. June Price & Lee Turner.

P.S. We know you need volunteers & will pass the word around amongst our CAT LOVING FRIENDS. Can you send us some brief information about VOLUNTEER opportunities? How long are the shifts & what exactly is needed? Also what about looking after the AIDS kitties? As most of our friend's work all week & live here in Vancouver the volunteering would be only available on Saturday or Sunday. Please let us know. You can e-mail us.