



**CITY OF CENTERTON
SPECIAL
CITY COUNCIL MEETING
CALLED BY DARREN WARREN, AMY ROCHETTE
AND
JUSTIN COWGUR
DECEMBER 5, 2022**

(1) Roll Call -

The Special City Council Meeting was called to order by Mayor Bill Edwards at 6:00 p.m. Those Present and answering roll call were Mayor Bill Edwards, Misty Elam, Darren Warren, Josie Reed, Keith Higginbotham, Justin Cowgur and Amy Rochette. Those present and not answering roll call were City Clerk Todd Wright, City Attorney Brian Rabal, HR Director Jocelyn Diaz, Police Chief Cody Harper, Police Captain Chris Kelley and Animal Control Officer Jeremy Rhodes.

(2) Animal Control Discussion -

Mayor Edwards addressed the Council, detailing an incident at the Centerton Animal Shelter on or around 11/17/2022, involving the euthanization of two (2) dogs by the Animal Control Director, resulting in an HR investigation and the subsequent termination of the Animal Control Director. Edwards stated that he also asked the Centerton Police Department to investigate the incident, in regard to any possible violations of State Statute. He said that investigation is ongoing. He stated that he turned over the control of the Animal Shelter to the Centerton Police Department. Edwards provided Animal Shelter statistics for years 2018-2022 and defined “No Kill Shelters”.

Council Member Amy Rochette detailed a discussion and email interaction she had with Jackie Roach of Best Friends Animal Society in regard to her experiences with the Centerton Animal Shelter. Rochette had the following recommendations:

- Unlock the Shelter Office
- Oversight for Euthanization
- Animal Shelter Software
- Allow Volunteer Assistance

- Food Receipts and Records

Council Member Justin Cowgur asked HR Director Diaz if there have been previous complaints against the Animal Shelter. Diaz stated that there have been concerns, but no formal complaints filed. She said she has made visits to the shelter with no visible issues. Cowgur asked about euthanization and cremation numbers. Jeremy Rhodes said paper records and Microsoft Word are being used to keep records. Police Chief Cody Harper said cremations are billed by the pound, and numbers would be skewed, due to animals picked up on the side of the road also being included.

Council Member Darren Warren said he has received numerous complaints recently about the Animal Shelter. He touched on some of the complaints and compliments from Jackie Roach, of Best Friends Animal Society. He recommended that some kind of Animal Shelter software be purchased and used. He recommended that if there were needs for washing machines, air conditioning or other needs at the shelter, to let council know.

Council Member Misty Elam asked for clarification of how intakes of dogs from different cities were documented, Jeremy Rhodes clarified. Elam asked if the amounts of food per dog was being documented. Rhodes said it was not documented, but that staff was conscious about trying to keep the weights of the dogs up. He said dogs that were to get more food were listed as such.

Council Member Cowgur asked about Purchase Order system for the city. Mayor Edwards said it has been in place for 5-6 months. Cowgur asked about updating our Employee Evaluations. Mayor Edwards said HR Director Diaz has already updated the Employee Evaluations. Mayor Edwards said he was not aware of a software need for the Animal Shelter. Cowgur recommended that records also be kept for donations. Cowgur questioned the accountability for the loss of three (3) Department Directors this year.

(3) Public Comments –

Elizabeth Edwards (Centerton) - Stated that Council asked the Mayor not to micromanage his employees.

Male (name not given) – Asked why Council took this long to address these issues if they have heard complaints.

Nicola Hoofard (Centerton) – Asked why Council didn't bring any complaints forward sooner.

Diana Allen (Centerton) – Asked about the population of the Animal Shelter and Staff numbers. She also asked about the feeding, medical, and exercise and social schedule for dogs at the Shelter. She said all of that should be tracked.

Romaine Kobilsek (Ozark Freedom Drivers) – Disappointed in the care at the Centerton Animal Shelter. Feels puppies should be vaccinated and de-wormed at intake. Keith Higginbotham questioned re-vaccinating dogs. She said studies show that risk is minimal if dogs are being re-vaccinated. She stated that she has seen other poor care recently at the shelter. She offered her help.

Jordan Good (Centerton) – Detailed a dog attack on her husband. She was disappointed in the process. Mayor Edwards detailed the communication regarding this incident and read the police report.

Katherine Smith (Business Owner in Centerton) – Had a successful experience with the Animal Shelter. She expressed concern with use of donations her business has made to the shelter. Finance Director Carl Rabey stated that any specific donations go to that department to support the budget of the department.

Darren Warren (Council Member) – Stated that he would volunteer to start a committee to help with Policies and Procedures for the Animal Shelter.

Emily Enslow (Centerton) - She said many rescue groups are willing to help the shelter. She said she has offered her help in the past and was denied.

Wanda Staynew (sp?) (Treasurer for Cave Springs) – Said the two euthanized dogs came from Cave Springs and were dumped there. She said they were not chipped.

Holly Brookhouser (Centerton) – Stated that she has offered to volunteer at the shelter, but was told that there weren't enough employees to monitor volunteers. Mayor Edwards said we have never had volunteers, which he believes is due to liability issues.

Tim Brasuell (Canine Cabins Resort) – Asked how much the fee for a dog is. Rhodes said \$100.00 per dog. He asked if the shelter has cameras. Mayor Edwards said it has a camera that records on a continuous loop. He also asked about euthanization and cremation numbers.

Lisa McCoy (Centerton) – Asked about transferred dogs and/or dogs that were picked up by volunteer services. She questioned the statistics and information provided by and for the Shelter. She asked for a Shelter Committee to be formed. She said that Department Training also needs to be documented.

Wendy Henson (Centerton) – Stated that she took a Care Basket to the Animal Shelter and was not allowed inside for a photo. She said she has good dealings with Jeremy at the Shelter. She questioned Mayor Edwards' leadership ability.

Justin Cowgur left the meeting at 8:08 pm, after a verbal altercation with the Mayor.

Chris Kelly (Police Captain) – Accepts the responsibility of leading the Animal Shelter. He stated that he has taken a lot from this meeting tonight and is ready to move forward.

Cody Harper (Police Chief) – Stated that we will need to look into Liability Waivers for Volunteer Work. He said he has the keys to the euthanization drugs. He said our Code outlines the options for sick or dangerous dogs. He said we have coverage at the shelter. He said food and general supplies are currently good. He said there will need to be some changes to the facility to make it more inviting to the public. He said there is not currently a reception area, and you currently walk into the Director's Office and drug holding area. He said we can come up with a buzzer system to let staff know when visitors are there.

Debbie Urteaga (Centernton) – Stated that trust has been broken and needs to be restored. She said there needs to be change and transparency quickly. She recommended use of volunteers from the community. She said tomorrow is new day.

Jason McCoy (Centernton) – Stated that he feels there is a failure in leadership and recommended that the Mayor to step down.

Josh Urteaga (Centernton) – He said he is angry that 2 dogs lost their lives. He said he is also angry at the Council Members for slinging mud at each other, instead of fixing the problem. He said he doesn't work well with people who are actively trying to subvert and attack him. He said the mud-slinging has dissipated since Councilman Cowgur left the meeting. He said a Council Member throwing a fit and storming out of a meeting is unacceptable. He said that should be looked at, and the citizens of Centernton deserve better. He said there is a lot of work to be done to build trust back in the community. He said he is also appalled at the Mayor's actions this evening. He asked for him to do better. He commended Jeremy Rhodes, Chief Harper, Captain Kelley, Misty Elam and Josie Reed for their demeanor during this meeting.

Zachary Jenkins (Centernton) – Stated that he works at Camp Bow Wow. He said he recently had an interview at the Centernton Animal Shelter. He said he saw fecal matter and urine in the kennels at the Shelter. He said hay was being put down outside for the warmth of the dogs. He said he was told no dog would be put down unless it is due to old age, sickness or aggressive behavior. He said the Mayor needs to either do his job or step down.

Mayor Edwards, Council and Staff listed some takeaways from tonight's discussion:

- Update the Software
- Public Access to the Shelter (after reworking the office layout)
- Define Oversight
- Form a Committee or Board
- Check on Liability when allowing Volunteer Help
- HVAC

- Euthanization Policy
- Look at existing Codes
- Policies and Procedures
- Council Updates
- Hire or Promote an Animal Control Supervisor/Manager

Mayor Edwards stated that we can discuss the Open Position at the next meeting.

Mayor Edwards said he will spend more time in each of the departments, and learn more about what is going on.

Mayor Edwards asked the Council if there were any other questions. There were none.

(4) Adjourn-

Darren Warren made a motion to Adjourn at 8:48 p.m. with a 2nd from Amy Rochette. All Council Members voted in favor and the motion carried.

Bill Edwards, Mayor

Todd Wright, City Clerk