

Animal Control
2008 Annual Town Report

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As always 2008 was a very busy year especially when there is only one Officer for the entire town. I do have to say I was very surprised that a lot of people were very considerate when I could not get to their call right away. The New Year brought a new licensing system to the clerk's office which would take some time to clean up some of the clichés but I think in the long run this program will be a huge benefit to both Animal Control and the clerks office. I started to help the clerks office with the program in February but once the weather started to warm a little well lets just say the animals were out and about.

Spring and summer proved to be challenging as even though the department was 1 person strong the animals did not care. To them it was like that song " WHO LET THE DOGS OUT WOOF WOOF WOOF". I think the biggest challenge for me is to realize that I can not do it all and there would be calls that just did not get answered , which is very hard since I am so particular on making sure everyone gets a call back. It really does not matter how big or small the complaint or call is I think it is just a common courtesy to return a call, whether I speak to someone or leave a message. This is difficult when you are the only person for 62 square miles of town with a lot of animals and people in between. Sometimes I thought of myself as the ping pong ball being slapped back and forth across the table , only that I was being slapped back and forth across the town.

With the passing of question 1 at town meeting \$5000.00 was budgeted for emergency calls. The only problem with this was that I would have to train 2 D.P.W. employees on the merits of how to be an Animal Control Officer in just 1 week(40 hours). It takes a very special type of person to deal with animal issues let alone all of the different calls that animal control deals with. Needless to say I did my best and 1 worker remains on call from time to time while the other (only 2 applied for the position) decided it was not his cup of tea. Being the only person on duty did take a toll on my well being and due to some personnel issues I had to take a leave of absence . This left the Town without an officer which is not a very good thing. Cheryl Jackson a past officer reapplied for the position and since she knew how the department was run it was obvious that she should be hired back . I am very thankful for Cheryl's' return . Upon my return I found that the department was not in a turmoil like I had thought it would be .

Needless to say another year has passed and seeing that the future looks a little gloomy I thought that I would just address some ways for the residents to deal with a situation when it arises.

1. A neighbor's dog keeps coming into my yard to do their business, dig holes, chase my cat, etc.. First would be speak to your neighbor about the issue if you have already done this I would suggest calling animal control as well as take a picture of the dog . The odds of an officer getting to your call and seeing the dog loose is very slim . As they say " a picture is worth a thousand words". This will help when the owner says " oh no not my dog" the facts will be clear as day and due process will prevail. Once an officer has proof they can start by issuing a warning or a citation for the offense. If the owner does not pay the citation it is up to the officer (which is myself) to send notices

and file a complaint in 3rd District Court for non payment of the citation.

2. My neighbor allows their dog to bark for long periods of time. Again speaking to them should be the first step. Unfortunately I find that we do not seem to communicate with our neighbors like we used to years ago. The town does not have a set time for dogs to be allowed to bark. Our by-law states if the dog is habitually barking, howling, or yelping in which it disturbs anyone, or a sickly person, and is documented by an animal control officer or police officer it is a violation. I would start out by calling the animal control office and leave a message with the address of the owner as well as your name and number. Then if animal control is not on duty call the police and file a complaint. If an officer is available they will send one to the location. The procedure is to inform the owner of the complaint and file a report and forward to Animal Control. If you have a video camera and this has been an ongoing problem I would suggest making a video of the dog barking. By no means should you tease the dog into barking or invade the privacy of your neighbor. If you can see the dog direct the camera toward the dog but if you can not see the dog a simple video tape of the direction of the barking will help. Leaving a number to contact you will allow the officer to explain how the system works and advise you of your rights as well as the rights of your neighbor.

3. I have a stray dog/ cat in my yard. Again ask your neighbors if they own the animal. Especially cats as most neighbors do not look for their cats until days later. Call Animal Control and inform them a.s.a.p. By law you are required to inform the Animal Control officer in the town where the animal was found within 48 hours. Leave a name, telephone number and address for that officer to call you back. If at all possible safely restrain the animal until someone arrives. This will insure that the animal will be out of harms way.

4. I have been feeding a cat(s) and have too many now. This has become a huge problem everywhere not just Dartmouth. One cat can produce 2 litters a year of usually 5 kittens per litter. I am sure you can do the math. That is certainly a lot of cats. Every town/city handles this situation differently, and some do not handle it at all. Fortunately for Dartmouth residents we have 3 options.

a. The first is a spay/ neuter / release program that involves trapping the cats and then releasing them back at the location for the colony feeder to continue to care for the cats. This seems to be the most productive way to deal with the issue. This usually involves the Habitat For Cats organization which is an all-volunteer group of people who assist with the trapping and cost of such a project.

b. Second is a trap and euthanize option- This also involves trapping the cats but the owner or feeder at the property must do this. They must purchase the traps to do the trapping and deliver the cats to the town shelter where they are usually held for 3 days (if possible). The shelter will evaluate the cats and if they are adoptable (most are not) they will be placed for adoption. Those who are not would be euthanized at the town's expense. I do not recommend this as I have found that most people will start to feed a new cat that shows up and the process starts all over again.

c. The third option which is really not an option in my eyes would be to do nothing. Allow the cats to continue to breed until it is so out of control that they are producing kittens that are deformed or sickly. This also is when the Animal Control officer starts to issue very hefty citations for cats not vaccinated for Rabies, which is required by state law. As you can see the first option is usually the best and the road most residents take.

5. There is a wild animal on my back porch walking in circles. What do I do?

First do not open your door to feed it or get a closer look. Call the police department, explain situation and give your address and phone number. Then call animal control and leave your address phone number and location of sick animal. The police department will dispatch an officer if animal control is not on. Keep your animals inside and if there is an altercation with your pet use gloves to handle your animal and call your veterinarian

It is very important to leave your telephone number so that if the officer needs to speak with you on the issue they can. Sometimes we need additional information that only the caller can provide. Anonymous calls can be difficult to resolve and calls are kept confidential unless we have to take action beyond a courtesy call to the owner of the animal.

There are a lot more scenarios that I can give but then I would have a book by the end so I will stop here.

Animal Statistics 2009

Dogs Claimed-----60	Cats Claimed-----8
Dogs Adopted -----20	Cats adopted-----50
Dogs Euthanized-----19	Cats Euthanized -----38
Dogs picked up deceased-----1	Cats picked up deceased -----20

This does not include the numerous dogs that are picked up and returned to their owner , or the Quarantines and livestock issues that animal control handles for the Board of Health department.