

Madison County debates like cats and dogs regarding upcoming "No Kill" policy

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - Madison County's Animal Control Program is working toward having an extensive "no kill" policy by 2021 - but how that policy is implemented is being hotly contested.

One aspect of the potential policy, which is perhaps the most controversial is a new procedure involving cats, called "trap, neuter, release," or TNR. With this procedure, animal control officers working for Madison County would be dispatched to take trapped cats, allow them to be neutered by one of various agencies in the county,

including SNIP Alliance and Partners for Pets, and then return them to the area in which they were found, or perhaps a more rural area.

Madison County Animal Control Officer Bill Stough spoke against TNR previous to the meeting of the Madison County Public Safety Committee Monday afternoon in the Madison County Administration Building. That committee oversees the animal control department.

"Under this 'Community Cat' Program, they want us to pick them up, spay and neuter them, and take them back and leave them alone," Stough said. "I don't think it's going to work. It will severely shorten their lifespans, they'll basically be coyote bait at this point."

Currently, the Madison County Animal Control Department takes cats, which have already been trapped, either by citizens or traps left by the department, and attempts to adopt the ones able to be adopted. Unfortunately, Stough said the vast majority - 70-80 percent by his own estimates - are not adoptable, because they are basically feral and cannot be properly handled by people.

As it stands, such animals are euthanized under the current plan. This would no longer be the case if Madison County moves toward no kill, however. At least some of those feral animals would undergo TNR and be returned to where they were found or somewhere else in the county, a move Stough believes will not work and will have many citizens calling back.

Senior Director of Partners for Pets, Nev Fischer, provided a first draft of the county's no kill plan, which was approved by the full county board and returned to the public safety committee for approval. Fischer said TNR was one of many options available for the cats unable to be adopted due to feral behavior.

The plan, penned by Mike Perkins, does indeed have a multi-faceted approach to dealing with captured cats, with the TNR program promoted for feral cats, which are again the largest population of captured cats, the county's animal control department said.

Other measures include promoting pet adoption through partner agencies, promoting additional funding for spay and neuter clinics and spotlighting an animal of the week in local media. Additional assistance, according to the plan, would come from more engagement through various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Before any measure may be taken, however, the board would have to appoint a full-time administrator, develop a mission statement, update job descriptions, clarify policies and procedures and restructure a fee schedule.



Another aspect would come from community education presented to both schools and community groups, which would include the importance of spaying and neutering animals, how to be safe around strange animals, protecting animals from inclement weather, animal welfare and the law and the web of animal cruelty.

The Madison County Public Safety Committee did vote in favor to pass the current plan to the full county board for approval, adding a position of overseeing it with a grade 10, step one salary, which would be less than the \$60,507.20, which was last paid at the position.

Both advocates and detractors of the TNR program believe the measure will not cost taxpayers additional revenue. While expenses may raise, Stough and his fellow animal control officers believe that money may be offset by the agencies working to spay and neuter the stray animals, such as SNIP Alliance and Partners for Pets.

Highland Representative Judy Kuhn abstained from the otherwise unanimous vote to pass the draft of the plan upwards to the full county board. Kuhn said she was "very

much in favor of no kill shelters," but said she believed the responsibility for such shelters should reside with the municipalities instead of with the county, adding Highland has a thriving program of its own.

If this plan is passed by the full Madison County Board, it will return to the Public Safety Committee for additional amendments, of which all committee members were in favor upon the draft's passage Monday afternoon.